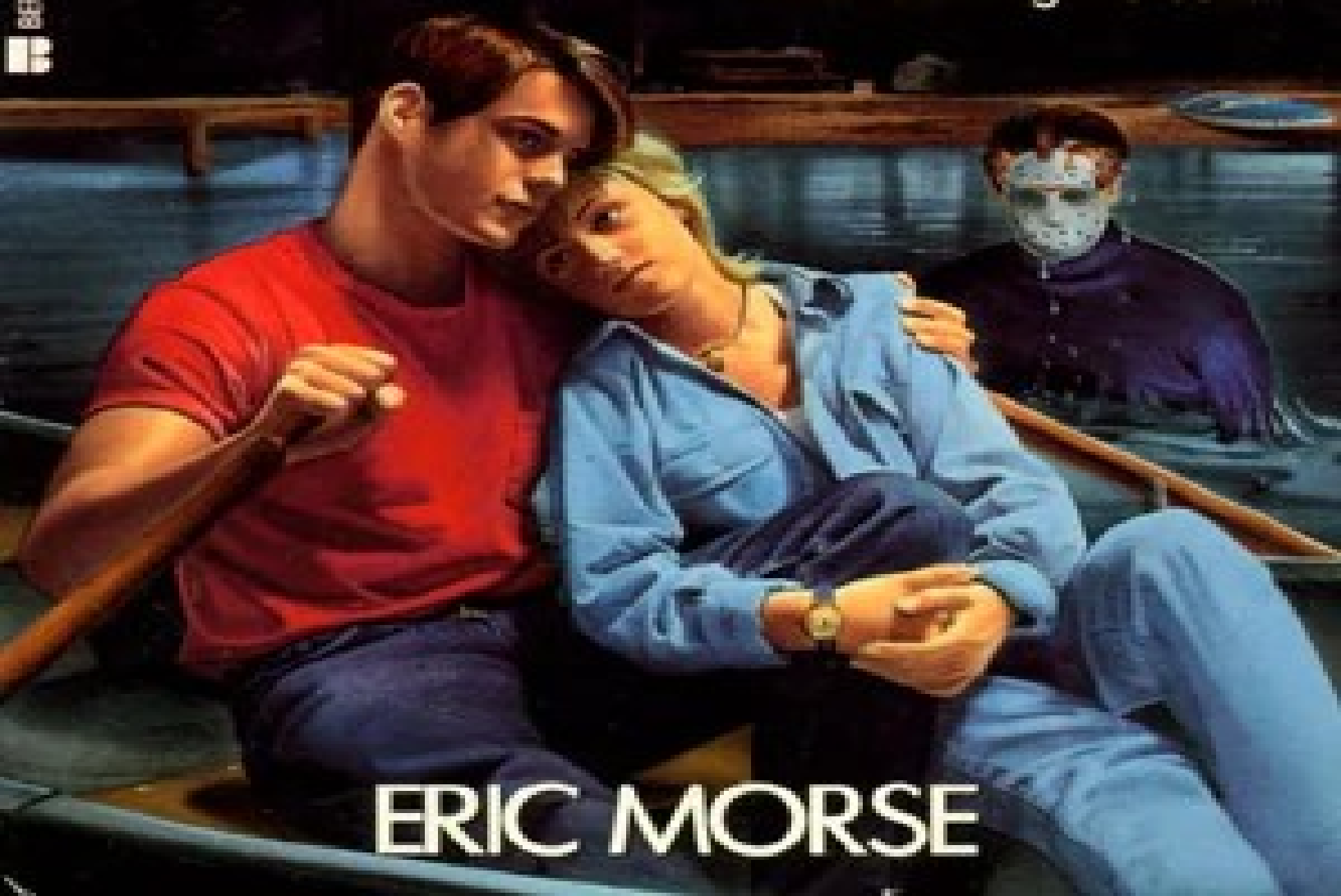


The second CAMP CRYSTAL LAKE novel

FRIDAY THE 13TH

**JASON'S
CURSE**

JASON'S GONE FISHING!
And he's using live bait...



ERIC MORSE

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Prologue

Gon Fishun

It was a little before six on a warm May morning. Above the thick mass of pine trees, the sun, a huge ball of orange, was just beginning to rise over Crystal Lake.

At this hour, the glassy surface of the water was hidden under a thick layer of mist. Everywhere you looked, streaks of gray gently rose and fell like restless ghosts.

Way out toward the middle of the lake, partly hidden by the mist, floated an old white rowboat. The large man in the rowboat was sitting so still he might almost have been a boulder or some other part of the scenery. He was holding a fishing rod with both hands. He stared straight ahead.

The man shivered. Ma was right, he thought. Coming out here barefoot, wearing just overalls and his fishing cap—it hadn't been such a good idea.

Breathing heavily through his mouth, the big man started to rewind his reel. There was no tension on the line, and Big Red asked the question he asked himself every morning: Why didn't he ever catch a fish?

Maybe it was because he always forgot to bring the bait.

Big Red had a routine. He woke up around five. First things first, he reattached his artificial leg. Then he stuck in his glass eyeball and went out to the outhouse to do his business. Then he fed the slop and garbage to the hogs, Sally, Mae, and Delilah. That was Big Red's morning chore. He never forgot his morning chore.

Well, it was easy to remember. Because the hogs started squealing the moment they saw him come out of the shack. Gee, he loved those hogs.

Then what he did next was, he searched for a scrap of newspaper and a pencil and he wrote Ma and Pa a note.

Gon Fishun.

He left them the same note every morning. So they'd know where he'd gone.

It seemed like he was always out in the middle of the lake by the time he remembered the worms.

Pa said you needed worms to catch fish.

Well, this was his favorite part of fishing anyway—slowly turning the handle and listening to that *tick-tick* sound as the plastic line wound itself around the reel again and again. Big Red kept slowly winding the crank handle until at last—

The silver fishhook sprang up out of the dark water, glinting in the sunlight. The hook was empty. No fish.

Big Red was disappointed, but in a way, he was glad, too.

He didn't like the idea of the hook's three sharp prongs slashing into the soft mouth of some poor creature. Big Red had never been able to hurt anyone. Not even a flea. Which he always seemed to have plenty of.

He raised the long rod over his head and cast the hook as far as he could. He watched for the tiny splash as the hook hit the water, thirty yards away. Then he sat very still, letting the hook settle to the bottom.

After a few minutes, Red started his favorite part of fishing all over again. He rewound the reel. Except this time—

He felt it almost at once.

There was a tug on the line.

A gentle tug, to be sure, but a real tug nevertheless. Something was nibbling on the hook.

The first thing that appeared in Red's good eye was fear, almost as if he'd done something wrong. His mouth fell open. Then his heart started to pound. Oh my God! He had finally caught one!

Frowning with concentration, Big Red started rewinding the reel, not slowly, like he usually did, but as fast as he could. The fish at the other end tugged harder; the rod bent over, pointing down at the water. He had caught a whopper!

Boy, would Ma and Pa be surprised! He could almost see the surprised look on their faces when he brought in this fish. Now it would be Big Red's turn to pose for a snapshot outside the Fish &

Bait, holding up his prize. Everyone would slap him on the back. Everyone would be proud of him. Everyone!

As he rewound the line faster and faster, Red got so worked up he couldn't sit still. He started tapping his good foot, slapping it up and down in the dank water at the bottom of the boat. He was giggling as —

The fish sprang up out of the water. It was so big and white it made Big Red gasp.

Except it wasn't a fish.

He stared at his catch, spinning slowly at the end of his line. His face fell. Carefully, he removed the white thing from the hook. He stared at it.

Instead of a fish, Big Red had caught a thin white plastic disk. The disk was pitted with little black holes. Near the top there were two big black holes like eyes, near the bottom was one big black hole like a mouth.

The round white thing reminded Big Red of something. Suddenly he remembered what it was. He lifted his head straight up, looking up at the sky for the moon.

The rays of sunlight slanted down on his face, making him squint. No moon. He had forgotten what time of day it was.

But Big Red was right. The thing in his hands did look a little bit like the man in the moon.

Big Red had once asked his Ma why the man in the moon looked so sad all the time. Ma had said it was because the man in the moon felt sorry for Big Red. Felt sorry for the big man who couldn't have a job or a wife like other men his age. Ever since then, Big Red had liked the man in the moon very much.

Red hugged the white plastic disk tightly against his overalls with his large soft hands. Then he turned it over. On the back of the disk was a black plastic strap. Like it was a mask.

Big Red had an idea. He lifted the white mask to his face. The mask was cold and wet and smelled mossy like the lake water Big Red sometimes drank. He carefully positioned the plastic strap over the back of his big bald head. Then he fitted the mask over his face so that his one good, baby-blue eye stared out the eyehole.

Right away there was this sucking sound. Big Red gasped. The mask seemed to be attaching itself to his face like some huge leech. Big Red's hands gripped the sides of the mask, trying to pull it off. But it was too late. He couldn't budge it.

Then the pain came.

Big Red screamed. He clutched his head. It felt like someone was reaching into his body and clawing out his insides, as if the three prongs of his fishhook had gone up his nose and were pulling out his brain.

He thought the pain would never stop. When it finally passed, Big Red sat very still. His left eye was tingling. Which was strange. Because that was his *glass* eye. He'd lost his real eye when he was twelve.

Then the tingling started in his left leg. Which was also strange. He had lost his left leg when he was fourteen.

Quickly, the sensation spread to the V-shaped indentation in his bald head, which he'd had as long as he could remember.

And then it was as if his entire body were shaking violently, but only on the inside. As if all the cells of his body were opening up, like doors unlocking.

Hidden behind his mask, Big Red's face turned as red as his name. A new feeling began flashing through him like wildfire. It was a feeling Big Red had never felt before, but still he knew the names for it. It was *anger*! It was *fury*! It was *hate*!

Big Red clenched his large square hands into big fists. He knew what he had to do.

Behind the mask, his glass eye turned slowly and squeakily in its socket.

The glass eye pointed toward shore.

Kelly

At the same moment that Big Red was putting on the mask in the middle of Crystal Lake...

Kelly Boone was standing in the kitchen of her funky off-campus housing share in Newkirk, Massachusetts, dealing with a headache that felt like a fishhook in her brain. The pain, along with her nervousness and worrying, had kept her up all night yet again.

"Oh, God," she mumbled.

She leaned against the kitchen counter—which was covered with dirty dishes, open boxes of cereal, and other junk—and held her forehead with both hands. She'd been having the migraines all year. Ever since last May. Ever since—

Kelly opened the cabinet sharply, as if trying to snap the thought out of her brain. She found the Tylenol bottle. When had she taken the last three pills? Four in the morning? Five? Too soon for more. She put the bottle back. The pain was beginning to subside, anyway.

She was a tall and very pretty girl who had just turned eighteen. She had dirty-blond hair, an open face, and frank, gray-blue eyes. But that wasn't the thing that first struck people about her. One look at Kelly and people could tell that something awful had happened to her. She was marked, in a way that made strangers who passed her in the street turn to glance back at her, as if they thought they knew her.

Right now her pretty features had an almost grayish cast. She wiped sweat from her face with the long sleeve of her army fatigues jacket.

Pain—it had come to seem to her like a wily enemy. And whenever the pain disappeared, Kelly always suspected a trick. As if her headache was just retreating so it could ambush her again.

She had her head bent low, and she found herself staring down at a half-eaten plum on the counter that was attracting fruit flies. She tossed the soggy pit in the trash. Of the nine college students and dropouts who shared this run-down house on the outskirts of town,

only five were actually paying any rent. And only two—Kelly's boyfriend, Doug, and Doug's ex-girlfriend, Lisa—were actually on the lease. And, out of the nine, only Kelly ever did any serious cleaning up.

She didn't care. She mostly did the cleaning on the nights when she couldn't sleep, the dark nights when the demons came to get her. Sometimes cleaning the house seemed like the only thing keeping her sane.

May was a particularly bad month for Kelly. She figured it was probably going to be that way for the rest of her life.

Last May, she was still in high school and life still seemed kind of a gas. Last May, her older brother, Boone, was still living at home, over the garage. Last May...

The Mr. Coffee machine suddenly sputtered loudly as the last drops of water dripped through the filter. Gritting her teeth, Kelly picked a mug out of the sink, rinsed some water in and out. She filled the mug with coffee so close to the brim she had to stand by the machine sipping for a couple of minutes before she could transport the cup to the kitchen table.

She had cleaned and scrubbed the table tonight, even using her long hunting knife to pick out the crud that clogged the seam in the middle between the two wooden leaves. The only thing sitting on the table now was her black spiral notebook. *The notebook.*

She carefully set down the coffee, then hunted in the clutter on the counter for the seashell ashtray. Sitting down in front of the notebook, she lit an unfiltered Camel.

Last June she'd been watching TV in the middle of the night and had seen a program about the controversy over the Joe Camel ads. Critics said the ads were aimed directly at kids. They said that Joe Camel was now as familiar a cartoon character among little kids as Mickey Mouse. They also said that unfiltered Camels were among the deadliest cigarettes in the world.

Kelly had been smoking Camels ever since.

She inhaled deeply—once, twice. Then, and only then, did she open the notebook.

Whenever he could get ahold of her on the phone, Kelly's dad always got on her case for not applying to college. "What do you do with your time?" he usually ended up shouting.

Kelly never answered that question. How could she explain her schedule? Gee, Dad, mostly I stay up all night and sleep all day. Mostly I walk around like a zombie, trying to remember who I am.

Since school, Kelly had held a series of lousy part-time jobs, like being cashier at the Serious Runner out at the Owings Mills Mall. People had always thought of her brother Boone as being so irresponsible, but the truth was that if Boone said he was going to be somewhere at such and such a time, he'd always showed up at that time, on the dot. He had taught Kelly to do the same. And she always had, until this year. One job after the next she kept showing up late, or sleeping through her entire shift, or going off on three-day camping trips in the woods without telling anyone—until sure enough, she'd get fired.

Other than getting fired... this notebook is what she did.

She'd spent hour after hour at the public library. Sometimes she borrowed Doug's beat-up Volvo and drove into Cambridge to use Harvard's Widener Library (her old friend Carly lent her her I.D.). Over the course of the year, she had gathered pretty much every clipping there was to gather on the events that had occurred over the years in the little backwoods town of Crystal Lake.

She stared down at the first entry, a photocopy of a tiny article in the *Crystal Gazette*: BOY DROWNS AT NEW CAMP.

This was how it had all started. Two counselors got horny and went off somewhere, so they weren't watching the waterfront, and this little boy, Jason, drowned in the lake.

Then came the murders, enough murders over the years to shut down that campsite but good.

Enough murders to start the rumors.

The locals believed that the dead boy kept coming back from the grave and taking his revenge. Since he had spent most of his youth underwater, legend had it that Jason wore a white hockey mask to hide his bloated and rotted face. It was a monster legend, pure and

simple. Like the Loch Ness monster. At first, Kelly hadn't believed a word of it.

She kept turning the pages, pausing for big gulps of coffee and long drags on her cigarette. Then she stopped. She didn't want to turn to the next page.

When she did turn the page, the headline seemed to scream up at her, burning into her eyes: HUNTER'S DEATH SPREE CLAIMS SEVEN.

Photos of bodies strewn through the woods. One of the most shocking photos showed a young man lying in the dirt, his head blown off. Before she could slam the notebook shut, the bold print of the caption jumped out at her... **identified as the body of 21-year-old William Boone.**

Kelly stubbed out her cigarette viciously. She rocked back and forth. She pressed her fingertips against her eyes, as if trying to squeeze the images out.

Boone had taken six kids out to the old campsite, the one she and Boone had discovered backpacking just a few weeks before. Only Carly McDonnell, a friend of Kelly's from high school, had come out alive.

One of the things that kept gnawing at her was that Kelly was supposed to have been there, too. She had had a sore throat that weekend. The one time she couldn't go off camping with her wild and fun-loving brother.

The thought that always came next for Kelly was one of the worst. When she thought these words, it felt like someone was reaching right into her guts and twisting viciously.

Maybe if I'd been there...

Maybe I could have saved him.

Kelly opened the notebook again and flipped quickly ahead, past the articles about the murders, all the way to Carly's letter.

Most kids thought of Carly as a priss, because she always got straight A's and wouldn't party hearty, as Boone liked to say. Kelly had never thought of her like that. She knew Carly was tough in her own way. It didn't really surprise her that Carly had made it out of there.

Last fall Carly had gone off to Harvard. (Which didn't surprise Kelly either. Carly had tutored Kelly in calc, so Kelly knew firsthand what a brain she was.) When Kelly first started her informal research project on Crystal Lake, she used to call Carly all the time, begging her to tell her what had really happened out there in the woods. Carly would never talk about it. She just kept saying that it was over. She said she wanted to put it all behind her.

Finally, Kelly bugged her so much she sent her this letter. For the first time, Carly told her the real story. Told her the horror she had *seen* with her own eyes.

In her letter, Carly said she'd never told anyone this stuff before. The one time she'd tried—with her school shrink—the psychiatrist had quickly recommended she take medication.

According to Carly, the hunter who attacked them was wearing Jason's hockey mask. The mask had possessed him and turned him evil. The mask had given him his power.

"Right now that mask is sitting at the bottom of Crystal Lake," Carly wrote at the end of her letter. "It's over. Kelly, I'm asking you as a friend, don't bring this up with me again. In fact, you should probably burn this letter, because if the wrong people ever got ahold of it I'd probably be committed or something. Kelly, I know it hurts. It hurts me too. But you've got to remember"—

Kelly didn't read the last line. She didn't have to. She knew it by heart. *You can obsess about this the rest of your life. It isn't going to bring Boone back.*

She flipped the page, her thin lips tightening. She knew she couldn't bring Boone back. Jesus, Carly! That wasn't the point.

She hadn't been there for him. Hadn't been there for a brother who had always been there for her. Like the time when she was eleven and she and Marci Nottonson were playing hide and seek down by the reservoir. They'd ended up getting found by some older kids from the poorer town of Dunhill. A bunch of bullies who kept poking the two girls with sticks and demanding that they do a striptease. Suddenly, out of nowhere, there was this roar. Boone came riding out of the woods on his motorcycle, which he didn't even have a license to ride yet. He scattered those kids like a flock of geese.

When she was growing up, Kelly's parents had never really involved themselves with their children. They had had problems of their own. Boone had been more like Kelly's father than her real father. He was always teaching her cool stuff. How to ride a motorcycle, how to hot-wire a car, how to pick a lock, how to survive in the woods with just a knife...

Thinking about that last skill really tore at Kelly's heart, considering what had happened.

Boone...

As she lit another cigarette, Kelly noticed that her hand was shaking—fast tiny shakes like a hummingbird. And speaking of birds... they were just starting to twitter outside the kitchen window. The gloomy black-gray sky had changed abruptly to white gray. The sun was coming up.

Kelly rubbed her face. As usual when she'd been up all night, she felt numb rather than tired. Her face had this thick feeling and her vision seemed a little blurry around the edges, as if her face had shifted and her eyes weren't looking out the eyeholes.

And then, abruptly, she realized she was crying. No sound came out. Her face barely moved. But the tears flowed freely, down her pale cheeks, a few tears curling into the corners of her mouth. She tasted salt.

"No," she said softly. But the tears didn't stop.

She had gotten into the habit, over the months since his death, of talking to her older brother. At first she only did it in her head. But the last few weeks she had found it was more comforting, even if it seemed a little insane, when she talked to him out loud.

"I've got a plan," she said. "Boone... I'm telling you, I've got a plan."

Suddenly, Kelly's face wrenched tightly as sobs shook her. She wrapped her arms tightly around her thin body. She felt so cold. But at least when the tears finally subsided her headache was gone.

She looked down. Her eyes were wet, so now her vision was really blurred. But she kept flipping through the notebook. It was the last entries in her notebook that interested her the most.

MAN SHOTS WIFE, THEN SELF... RABIES OUTBREAK CLAIMS TWO MORE LIVES... BOY, 9, HANGS DOG... ELDERLY

WOMAN POISONS NEIGHBOR...

All the articles were datelined Crystal Lake, Massachusetts. All were from the last year.

Seemed like an awful lot of bad news for one town, now, didn't it?

Kelly cradled her coffee mug with both hands, held it up to her cheek. "He's back," she said quietly.

She was sure of it. He—it—whatever it was that was bringing evil to that town had returned.

And she was going to trap it, kill it, destroy it.

She was going to get revenge.

For Boone. For her.

"I'm coming, Boone," she said.

Boone didn't answer.

Ma and Pa

"Pa!" Ma said sharply.

Pa stopped snoring but didn't wake.

Ma poked her husband in the ribs with the handle of the broom she'd been using to sweep up their shack. "Get up!"

"Mmm," he moaned into the pillow. "What time is it?"

"Almost seven, for God's sake."

"Seven," Pa repeated, with a snort of disgust. He lay still a moment longer. "What day is it?" he asked.

Ma's voice was even angrier now. "It's Thursday, fool."

Dramatically grunting and groaning, Pa finally sat up. Big mistake. The pounding in his head started up almost at once. Pa opened one eye. He stared at his old wife. He hated her guts for waking him, but the look on her face—cold as ice—scared him and made him look back down without a word. He swung his bare legs out of the bed and pretended to study his toes.

Pa was a grizzled man of seventy with white hair and white whiskers and rotten teeth. But despite his age, he was still strong and powerful and broad-shouldered. When he was a young man, he used to scare the bejeezus out of his wife and kid. Those were the days. When had the tables turned? Pa couldn't quite remember. "Why can't you ever let me sleep?" he growled.

"Come home at a decent hour," Ma said, not bothering to look at him. "Then you'll sleep."

The shack Ma was sweeping up was a tiny tar-paper box set about two miles back from Crystal Lake. She tried hard to keep it clean, but somehow the place always looked filthy. There were three metal-frame beds, one for Pa, one for Ma, one for Big Red. The mattresses had blankets but no sheets.

Pa eyed his wife with suspicion. "What you got a bee in your bonnet for?"

The big gray-haired woman was at the tiny gas-burning stove, where the dented old kettle was just beginning to whistle. "Just get up," she said.

Pa rubbed his face with both hands. "Where's Big Red?"

"He left us a note."

"Fishin'?"

"Yup."

Pa laughed bitterly. "That boy wouldn't know how to catch a fish if it jumped into the boat and tried to kiss him."

This exchange—or something close to it—was part of Ma and Pa's regular morning routine. But now Ma veered from the script. She turned quickly from the stove and her eyes flashed darkly. "You watch your tongue."

Pa chuckled a little more, but he watched his tongue and said no more. He got out of bed, and barefoot, stepped gingerly across the cold floorboards. He removed his baggy old trousers from a hook on the wall and climbed into them, leaving on his white long john shirt. He slipped his suspenders over his big bony shoulders.

"He's just a child," Ma said, spooning large amounts of instant coffee into a tin mug.

"Child?" Pa snorted. "He's forty-five years old."

"I said," Ma said firmly, "he's just a child."

"Well," the old man said. "I guess you're right." He made a *tsk* sound, sucking on a tooth. "He sure is a sweet boy."

He knew that would please her. Ma crossed to the table. She didn't look at him. But he could tell from the way her shoulders relaxed slightly that his comment had worked its magic. He knew her so well. Knew her like a book.

"I fixed you some Krispies," Ma said curtly.

Pa gave a satisfied grunt. As far as he was concerned, Rice Krispies was just about the only decent breakfast food known to man.

"What time did you get in last night?" Ma asked as he took his place at the rickety wooden table.

"Oh," he said, gazing off into space and wondering how big a lie he could risk under the circumstances.

"I smelled your breath when you come in," Ma said.

Under the circumstances, Pa decided he better not lie at all.

"Off drinking, weren't you?" Ma demanded. "With Tuck and Bud."

To avoid having to answer, Pa jabbed a large spoonful of Krispies into his mouth. His head was pounding. And every time Ma spoke so harshly and loudly, the pain of his hangover jabbed into him more deeply.

Ma sighed. "You never change, now do you?"

"Oh, I don't know about that, Ma."

"Nope. You never do. Never did, never will." Ma was smiling now, but it wasn't a pleasant smile. It was an insane kind of smile, and it made Pa very uneasy. "I mean," Ma said, "after what happened..." She trailed off, her voice catching.

"Now, Ma..." He tried for a placating tone. God, he hated this woman.

Ma was working herself up to a fever pitch. "After everything that happened, you can still drink?!" She spat out the words. "You're not fit for the hogs."

It was one of her favorite insults. It drove Pa right up the wall. "Don't say that, Ma," he warned.

"Don't say it?" She looked delighted. "I'll say it. I'll say it 'cause it's true."

"Don't say it," he said coldly.

Ma stuck her face right into his. Her breath was nothing to write home about either. This time she said the insult slowly and deliberately. "You're. Not. Fit. For. The. Hogs."

Pa could only take so much. He had just reached his limit. Suddenly, the anger was surging through him. He pushed away from the table. His mouth hung open. There were little Krispies stuck to his lips. "You never let up on me, do you?"

"That's right!" Ma bared her teeth.

"All my life you held this over my head!" Pa said. "It was an accident, you understand? An accident!"

She slapped him then. Hard, across the face. It wasn't the first time. But coming on top of his wicked hangover, this slap felt like the blow of a sledgehammer. Pa raised his fist. But something in Ma's

eyes scared him off. Instead of hitting her, he hit the table. He knocked the bowl of Krispies to the floor with a crash and a splash.

He was shaking. So was Ma. Then she was screaming. "You messed up my shack! You filthy, little—" She couldn't seem to find a bad enough word. Instead she charged. She grabbed a fistful of his suspenders and long john shirt and shoved him. He went flying backward so fast he bashed his head into the jutting edge of the wooden bookshelf.

There weren't any books on that bookshelf. Ma used the shelf for those dead cactus plants of hers. Two of which now landed on Pa's head, one right after the other.

Ma was cackling now, and shouting at the same time, the laughter and the yelling all mixing together. "That's what you get!" she kept saying. "That's what you get!"

Pa clutched his shaggy head of white hair and glared at her. Right then, it happened. He felt something snap. Felt it come over him—that white-hot heat of anger that usually only came when he was soused up pretty good.

He lunged. He reached for Ma's neck. By the look in his eye, she must have known what he intended to do with her neck if he ever got ahold of it. Because she didn't let him touch her. She brought her knee up fast, catching him right between the legs.

Amazing how much pain could come from that part of the body even after all these years.

He crumpled to the floor. For an instant, it felt as if his insides were leaving him and floating upward to the roof of the shack. Then the agony took over. It hurt so much he couldn't even moan.

Ma backed away. He was going to kill me, she thought, trembling.

He must still be drunk, was her next thought. Maybe she should get a bucket of ice water from the pump and douse the old man's head. But she was afraid. What if he got back to his feet before she got the water? After that kick, he'd really be out for blood.

So Ma changed directions, heading instead for the shelf above their bed. This was the matching shelf to the one Pa had just knocked into. Without taking her eyes off her fallen husband, she reached up with her hand and felt around for the shotgun.

It wasn't there.

And as she groped wildly, her hand touched something soft and warm.

She whirled around in horror.

Then she froze.

As big as she and Pa were, and they were both big people, it still amazed her that they had produced such large offspring. Big Red had to stoop whenever he came into the shack. Right now his huge hulking body blocked out almost all the sunlight coming in through the window behind him. The sun lit up his giant outline in rays of bright yellow.

Ma had her hand on the bare white skin of Big Red's left arm. She pulled it away as if she had stuck it in a fire.

"Big Red," Ma said. It came out almost like a question.

Because Big Red did not look like himself.

For one thing, he had covered his face with some strange white mask.

For another thing, he was holding the shotgun. He was pointing it right at Ma.

"What is it, boy?" Pa asked weakly from the floor. "Ya find somethin'?"

Big Red didn't answer. Didn't say a word. Ma and Pa would never know what was in his head. Never know the images his glass eye was now showing him.

In his head, he was seeing a scene that had once taken place in this very shack.

Pa and his best friends sitting at the wooden table. Uncle Tuck and Uncle Bud, passing around a large bottle of amber-colored whiskey. Around and around.

In the corner sat a battered wooden crib. Lying on his back in the crib was a big baby with bright red hair.

The baby was crying.

And every time the baby cried, Pa shouted at it to be quiet. Which didn't work. The baby cried harder. Until finally Pa got so mad he hit the baby with an iron.

The iron left a V-shaped indentation in the baby's skull.

The scene faded from Big Red's brain, but the hate remained. He turned his head away from Ma and watched as Pa struggled to his feet. Pa held out his hand toward Big Red. "Give me the gun," he ordered.

Big Red didn't move. Pa started walking slowly toward him.

"Little boys aren't supposed to play with guns," Pa said. "Now how many times I got to tell you that?"

Pa stepped closer. But something about the way Big Red was looking at him made him stop short. Maybe it was the way *both* of Red's eyes were gleaming behind the dark holes of the mask.

"Big Red," Ma sobbed. "Give Pa the gun like a good boy."

"Come on, Big Red," Pa said.

And then Pa grabbed for the barrel of the gun.

Big Red squeezed his finger. The shotgun roared.

Pa was only a foot away. The double barrels blasted a big hole right through Pa's stomach and out through the wall of the shack behind him, so that for one crazy second, Big Red could see pine trees right through his Pa.

Then Pa dropped to the floor like a sack of seed.

Ma dropped as well, falling to her knees. Her arms were spread wide. She was screaming.

Screaming just like she had that time so long ago when Big Red was still a baby. Big Red could see this scene in his head, see it clearly on the back of his glass eye—as if that glass eye were a little TV set in his brain.

On that night so many years ago, Ma had come in the door and found the drunk men and her baby.

Ma picked up the baby. The red-haired baby wasn't crying anymore. It didn't even seem to be breathing. Ma turned to Pa and started to scream.

The scene went dark, and Big Red was staring down at his old ma again; the old woman was still on her knees and crying.

Boy, Ma sure had gotten mad at Pa back then.

But that was all she had done. Gotten mad.

Big Red reloaded the gun. He stepped toward his mother, limping less than usual on his artificial leg.

Breakfast of Champions

At eleven that morning, Miguel Hernandez, just back from his morning jog, was sitting on the kitchen counter with his powerful arms crossed. "Okay, slave," he told his girlfriend, Tina, "make me breakfast."

"Yeah, right," Tina said without smiling.

Miguel was eighteen, Hispanic, with sexy dark eyes and a wispy mustache that he loved to stroke but which he could never get to really grow in. He was also short and powerful and built like a fireplug. His face had an almost bulldog quality. When he graduated from Parker High last year, he'd been voted "Most Likely to Kill Someone."

Right now he was wearing a gray Parker High sweatshirt with the sleeves cut off roughly at the shoulders. As he sat on the counter, he watched Tina prepare her breakfast; she poured Wheaties into a single bowl and carefully sliced a banana on top. She wasn't going to offer him any, he knew. Tina wasn't exactly the generous type. But Miguel didn't mind. Just as long as she kept going out with him—him, him, and only him.

"Breakfast of champions, eh?" he asked her.

She didn't bother to answer.

Miguel hopped down from the counter and started doing isometric exercises, squatting against the wall and holding himself rock steady until his legs began to tremble. All the time he kept his eyes on Tina. Her beauty inspired him.

Tina Chen was seventeen, a tall Japanese-American with shiny black hair that went all the way down to her bottom. She had an oval face that was a real killer. Miguel made a clucking sound.

"Cut it out," she said calmly, without turning her head to look at him. Instead, she studied the back of the Wheaties box. "I think Kelly was up all night again," she said with her mouth full of cereal.

"Why?"

"Did you see the house? The place is spotless. And her notebook is on the table here. Those are always the signs."

"Oh." His legs were killing him now, but he maintained the position. You couldn't give in to the pain. Never.

"The other day I found the window seat open. I go to close it and she's sleeping inside. I'm talking *in* the window seat. She nearly gave me a heart attack. She said she liked sleeping there because it was like sleeping in a coffin!"

"Cool, heh-heh-heh-heh," Miguel said, doing his Beavis and Butt-head imitation. Because of the isometrics, though, his voice came out all strained and tense; Tina turned to look at him. When she saw him exercising, she rolled her eyes.

"I'm worried about her," she said, turning back to her breakfast.

"Why?" he gasped through the pain.

"*Why?* Miguel, in case you hadn't noticed, the girl's like totally obsessed with this Jason thing. It's not exactly what you call healthy."

"Why?" Miguel repeated.

"Stop it. I'm serious. All she talks about is going out to the woods and killing Jason, killing Jason. Like anyone believes this Jason really exists. I mean, I know everyone in this house just *loves* Kelly and it's like we're not supposed to ever say anything bad about her. But I think the girl's going crazy, I really do. Somebody ought to wake up and smell the coffee."

Beads of sweat were popping out all over Miguel's face. "Ten more seconds!" he yelled at himself. He counted down silently, then groaned and stood up at last. His legs felt all rubbery. But he smiled and flexed his biceps. "Personally, I can't wait till we do it," he said.

"Do what?"

"You know. Kelly's plan. Monster-hunting."

"Oh, puh-lease," Tina said.

"Serious. That's going to be the greatest."

Like Kelly, Miguel hadn't applied to college yet. He worked at a dojo, a karate school. It was only one of the many martial arts he studied. This past week the school was being painted, so Miguel had

nothing to do. Seemed like the perfect time for a trip up to Crystal Lake.

"Let me give you a little hint," Tina said. "We're never going *monster-hunting*. That's just something Doug likes to joke about to make Kelly feel better, you know?"

"You're wrong, man," Miguel said. "Kelly's not crazy. It's just she's got this vision." Miguel's dark eyes glowed. Kelly had focus, determination, a goal—just like Miguel. Miguel's goal was to be a big war hero someday, like his dad. Kelly's goal was to kill a monster. Same kind of thing when you came right down to it.

"She gives me the creeps, personally," Tina muttered. "It's like there's something dead about her."

"Well," Miguel said, "she's been through a lot."

"Right, that's another thing. I'm tired of feeling sorry for her for what happened to her brother, you know? She's not the only one who's had bad things happen to her."

Miguel sighed. It embarrassed him when Tina said bad things about Kelly. As far as Miguel was concerned, Kelly was even nicer than her brother had been. About ten times nicer, in fact.

For instance, whenever he was broke, which was most of the time, Kelly lent him money, even though she barely had any herself. And she never reminded him about it, or asked for it back. Also, if he happened by the kitchen when she was eating (which wasn't too often, she never seemed to eat), she always offered to share her meal with him.

"She's got vision," he insisted.

Tina guffawed. "She's got *visions* plural! She's seeing things. The girl's delusional."

Tina was so smart she had finished Parker High a half-year early. She had already been accepted into New York University for next year, where she was planning on studying psychology. She was always throwing around these psychobabble terms. It drove Miguel nuts, especially when she used the stuff on *him*.

"Whatever," he said, hoping to end the discussion. He lifted the half gallon container of Tropicana from the kitchen table and started guzzling juice from the carton's plastic spout.

"Hey," Tina said, "that's the house OJ."

"So what? I don't have germs." Miguel wiped his lips with the back of his hand and gave a loud "Ah!" of satisfaction. But he didn't drink any more. "Man, would I love to meet that Jason," he said.

Tina smirked. "Get out of town."

"I would!"

"Believe me, if there really was a monster, Miguel, you'd wet your pants."

"Are you crazy? Never."

"Uh huh."

"I'm telling you. I'd take care of him—boom! bang!" Miguel started shadowboxing. He glided effortlessly into kickboxing, followed by a few Tai Chi moves and ending with a karate kick that almost knocked over the toaster.

"Careful!" Tina warned.

"I'm the Karate Kid," Miguel said, a little sheepishly.

"You're the idiot," Tina said.

That hurt. Why was she riding him so hard these days? Miguel came up behind Tina and put his strong hands around her shoulders, nuzzling her neck, but also gripping her hard. "You love me, baby, don't you?"

"No, I don't," she insisted, squirming to get out of his grasp.

"Morning, guys," said a cheerful voice in the doorway.

Miguel straightened as Doug Sanderson entered. Doug was this lanky good-looking guy who always managed to look cool and relaxed. He wasn't faking it, either. That was the amazing thing. Miguel had come to learn that his housemate really felt this way—cool and relaxed—most of the time.

Right now Doug was wearing black and orange Lycra bike-racing pants, a black Gap pocket T-shirt, and a silver-striped bike helmet. He took off the helmet and ran his hand straight back through his soft dark hair. "If you guys want to do the dirty deed," he told them casually, "I recommend using one of the bedrooms. Much more comfortable."

Miguel laughed and let go of Tina's neck.

"You're one to talk," Tina said, batting her pretty eyes in Doug's direction. "I hear you did it once on top of the piano."

The piano was an old and very beat-up baby grand that Boone had rescued from the town dump back in the years when he was using the house as his crash pad. The big black thing sat in the living room like some huge creature. It was missing half its keys and all its strings. But it made for a great table during parties. And, if the rumors were true, it also made a great place for—

Doug squirted Gatorade into his mouth from a red plastic squeeze bottle. He swallowed. Then he went back to grinning. "Who told you that?" he asked Tina.

Tina started playing with her long black hair. "Notice he doesn't deny it," she told Miguel.

But Miguel was noticing something else, something that he noticed about Tina a lot lately. She liked Doug.

"You know...I always wanted to learn how to play the piano," Tina told Doug in her huskiest, sexiest voice.

"Very funny," Miguel told her tensely. He gave her a meaningful look. In fact, he practically went bug-eyed giving her his best angry glare. She ignored him.

"Seen your girlfriend this morning, Douggie?" Tina asked.

"Who? Kelly?"

Tina laughed—it was closer to a squeal. "What's the matter? You don't know who your girlfriend is?"

Doug grinned and nodded appreciatively, as if to say, "You got me there." He squirted another mouthful. "She was up all night, I think."

"I told you so," Tina told Miguel.

Doug put one of his Air Jordans up on the kitchen table and started stretching out his hamstring. Right while she was eating breakfast, too. If Miguel had done that, Tina would have screamed bloody murder. But this time Tina didn't say a word.

Doug was twenty-three. He'd been going to the local community college for as long as anyone could remember, never taking too many courses a semester and often taking the same courses over, because he kept flunking. Most of his time he spent on girls. And for as long as Miguel had known him, Doug had been getting an A-plus in that

department. According to Dougie himself, for instance, that piano rumor was true, true, true. In fact, wherever Miguel went with Doug, he was always pointing out the sights, as it were. *See that couch, Miguel? Me and Suzie Rogers—right there. See that hammock, Miguel?*

Doug stopped stretching and crossed to the schedule he had thumbtacked to the kitchen wall. "Damn," he said. "I missed French again."

"Nice going," Tina said. But she was smiling that little smile of hers. Miguel felt his heart pounding.

Just then, the back door opened and Kelly came in. She was carrying a small portable tape recorder. She stopped short when she saw them; she mumbled a "Hi." Then she started rummaging noisily in the jam-packed kitchen drawers.

Tina caught Miguel's eye and rolled her forefinger around her ear, to indicate how far gone she thought Kelly was. Miguel glared at her. Doug laughed. So Miguel glared at him too.

"Does anyone have any extra batteries?" Kelly asked, apparently oblivious to the effect she was having.

"Batteries?" Tina asked, like this was the craziest thing in the world.

"I've got batteries in my Walkman you could have," Miguel offered. "The Walkman's busted but I think the batteries are still good."

"Great. Thanks."

Kelly unbuttoned the breast pocket of her army fatigue jacket and took out a small piece of paper, which she studied. "Tape recorder, batteries"—she made a check mark—"shovel, hammer, notebook, knife, blanket..."

"Earth to Kelly," Tina said. "Earth to Kelly."

Kelly looked up.

"What are you up to?" Doug asked her uneasily.

Kelly took a deep breath. "I'm going off for a few days."

Silence. They waited for Kelly to offer more of an explanation, but she didn't. Which wasn't unusual. All year Kelly had been disappearing for jaunts in the woods. But now Tina said, "Oh, God. You're doing it, aren't you?"

Tina said this to Kelly, but then she turned and added to Doug, "She's going up there."

Miguel pulled roughly on Tina's shoulder, trying to get her to face him. "Going where? Going where?"

Tina shook her shoulder free of his grasp. She kept looking at Doug, who kept looking at Kelly. "Oh, Jesus," Doug said. "That's not true, is it, Kell? Tell me that's not true."

"It's true."

"I asked you not to tell me that."

Miguel laughed loudly. No one else did, though, and Miguel ended up feeling foolish. He moved toward Kelly. "Wait a minute. Are you talking about what I think you're talking about? Monster-hunting?" Kelly nodded slightly. Miguel let out a whoop. "All right! See that, Tina? And you said she was just goofing."

Doug crossed to the fridge and pulled out a can of Bud. "Kelly, you know what? You're really"—he popped the beer top and took a long swig—"scaring me with this obsession."

Tina giggled into her hand. "Oh, you seem *really* worried."

Doug gave her an angry look, but the frown quickly dissolved into a smile, and the smile turned into a laugh—which meant he sprayed out a mouthful of beer.

Miguel dove backward, yelling, "Gross!"

Doug grinned lazily. "Sorry. Hey, Kell, you know what you need? You need sleep. How about a nice hot bath, and I'll rub your back—"

"No." Kelly said it quietly but firmly, in a way that suggested there was no way she would change her mind. "Today's the day, that's all. I mean, I was sitting here this morning, and I thought, you know, I've been talking about this plan of mine for a long time, haven't I? So what's wrong with me? Am I scared, or what? So then I just decided, you know. Today. Today."

"Tomorrow," Doug suggested.

Kelly ignored him. As she talked, she sawed the air with her hands. "You know how I know it's right? Because the moment I decided to go, I felt better. Because it's like, at least I know this is going to all be over soon. One way or another. Even if it kills me."

There was a heavy silence in the room. Even Miguel had to admit the girl seemed pretty badly messed up. He clapped his hands. "Okeydoke," he said. "I'm going too."

"Miguel," Tina said with a warning voice.

"C'mon, guys." Miguel turned to Tina and Doug. "What do you say? We go up there. It'll be a blast." He turned back to Kelly. "How far is this place?"

"Three hours' drive. I've got a map. But—"

"What do you say, Tina?" Miguel put his face right up to hers. "Huh? Huh?" She turned away. "C'monnn... it's an adventure, right? What do we got to lose?"

"Our time," Tina said drily.

Doug scratched his head. "How long would it take?"

Kelly held up her hands. "Guys, this is really sweet of you." She smiled kindly at Miguel, and the warmth and life briefly came back into her stunning gray-blue eyes. "But listen, this is something I've got to do alone."

"Alone?" Miguel's voice went up an octave. "You want to face that killer alone? Are you nuts?"

"That's just it," Kelly said. "Tina, I know you think this is all a bunch of garbage, but it's not. It's real, and it's dangerous and—and I can't ask you guys to take this risk. Really. I don't want you to."

"Kelly," Tina said, "you know what's out there? Nothing. Just some woods and some old abandoned cabins. I'm just saying this because I don't want you to be disappointed. There is no danger. Except from maybe yourself."

"Great," Miguel said, "then you won't be afraid to come."

"I'm not afraid, believe me," Tina said. "That's your department."

Miguel laughed wildly. "Me? I'm the one who's been volunteering to go all year, in case you hadn't noticed!"

"Guys," Kelly said, "I'm not talking about a little day trip here. I'm going to be gone overnight—at least. As long as it takes...."

"Kell." Doug draped an arm around her shoulder. He tried to get her to lean her head on him, but she wouldn't. "You're tired, Kell," he said. "You don't know what you're saying. It's like that time I stayed

up all night studying for that American History final. I thought if I didn't stay up, I'd flunk."

"You did flunk," Miguel pointed out.

"Right," said Doug, "so it was stupid to lose a night's sleep over it." He guffawed and shook Kelly, squeezed her; she gave him only the slightest of smiles. "Look, Kell," he continued smoothly. "If you go, *I've* got to go, you can see that, can't you? And that's bad. I mean I've got classes tomorrow."

That brought a cackle from Miguel. "Oh, like you care!"

"*And*," Doug said, smiling back, "I don't know about the rest of you, but visiting murder sites isn't my idea of a great vacation. So—"

Kelly pulled free. "I'm going," she said. "You're not. That's it."

Doug studied her grave and serious face. Then he sighed. "Okay," he said finally, holding both hands palm up. "Looks like I get to go driving around in the woods."

"You're in?" Miguel asked him.

Doug shrugged. "Yup."

Miguel slapped him on the back. "All right!" He turned to Tina. "So?" he asked. "That leaves you, babe."

"Where are you going to stay?" Tina asked Kelly, frowning.

"Right where Boone did," Kelly said grimly. "At the old Crystal Lake campsite. There are cabins, you know."

"Sounds deluxe," Tina said.

Miguel laughed nervously. "Look at her. Look how scared she is. What's the matter, babe? Afraid to sleep where someone got killed?"

Tina scraped her chair back from the table and stood up. She didn't meet Miguel's gaze. "I guess if everyone else is going," she said. Then she gave Doug that tiny smile of hers, curling up the edges of her mouth and flashing her eyes. Miguel felt jealousy claw at his heart.

Kelly looked from one face to the next. She felt her heart soften. "Okay," she said softly. "If you guys really want to do this..." She sounded choked up. "That'd be great."

Doug still had his hand on her shoulder; he pulled her toward him. "Hey, lighten up, Kelly, we're just going camping."

Kelly wiped her eye hard with the back of her hand. She laughed. "I think I *am* going crazy," she said.

Everyone laughed.

Kelly said, "Okay, listen, if you guys really want to come along, you gotta start packing up your gear." She glanced at the watch strapped loosely around her thin wrist. "It's a long drive, and we've got a lot of work to do when we get there."

"Terrific," Tina said glumly.

But Miguel threw back his head and whooped. It had suddenly kicked in for him. This was really happening. It felt like they were going into battle. It would be his first.

He gave a war cry. He pumped his fists.

"Hey, Jason!" he shouted. "Here we come!"

A Treat for the Hogs

Big Red sat at the wobbly wooden table, staring down through his mask at his huge bare feet, one of which was made out of hard blue Lucite. He'd been sitting in the shack for hours. He wasn't feeling so angry anymore. In fact, he was feeling real sorry he'd blown away Ma and Pa.

Now who would take care of Big Red?

The mask on his face was hot, almost burning to the touch. Behind the hot white plastic his face was dripping with sweat, the water running down his face in streaks and gathering in the seams of fat around his neck. And then there were the tears. He'd been blubbering off and on all morning. But even with all that moisture to ease the way, still he couldn't slide the mask off. He'd given up trying.

He looked down at the floor, at Ma's and Pa's bodies. Their eyes were open, all four of them. It was like they were looking at him. They looked so surprised.

Oh, boy. He was really in for it now. Sooner or later somebody would come by and then they'd see what Big Red had done. Uncle Bud or Uncle Tuck would come. Boy, would they be mad.

Unless...

Was there some way he could hide the bodies?

Big Red was mulling over this problem when, outside, the hogs began to squeal. The man lifted his large head, looking toward the sound.

His afternoon chore, he never forgot his afternoon chore.

Then he looked down again, at Ma and Pa.

You're not fit for the hogs. That's what Ma always said to Pa when she was really mad at him. But she didn't mean it. It was just a joke. She had explained that to Big Red many times.

Which meant, Pa really was fit for the hogs. Big Red stood slowly, the metal joint of his artificial left leg squeaking loudly. He bent down and picked up one of Pa's big bare feet, and used it to drag his father across the rough floorboards toward the door of the shack.

Right before he had put the shotgun to Ma's heart, she had scuttled backward across the floor until her back was up against the wall. She had held both arms up in the air, pleading with him. After Big Red shot her, she had stayed propped up against the wall, with one of her arms still up in the air, held up by the iron frame of Big Red's bed. Now Big Red took hold of this arm and started dragging her across the floor along with his pa.

Ma's hand was cold, but still it felt good holding it. Ma always let Big Red hold her hand when they were walking in the woods on their way to gather blueberries or when they went into town to run an errand.

Big Red had a little problem at the door. When he tried to drag both his parents outside at once, the doorway got kind of clogged. His father's whiskery face bashed into the side of the door and the teeth in his open mouth stuck into the wood.

The hogs were making a huge ruckus now, because Red had opened the shack door. They were smart, those animals. Pa used to say that the hogs were smarter than Big Red.

Red could see the three hogs, pushing their funny pink noses between the gray slats of the pigpen fence. Well, at least there was one good thing about what had happened. Now the hogs would have a special treat.

He carried Pa out of the shack first, then Ma. Then he started dragging both of his parents toward the pigpen by their hair.

Coming Home

Kelly drove the whole way. She insisted on it, even when Doug pointed out that she'd been up all night.

Doug sat next to her in the front seat. He was supposed to be navigating. But as it turned out, though he had slept soundly the night before, he ended up doing more napping than mapping, and they got lost three times.

Miguel and Tina sat in the backseat, with Tina scrunched all the way over to the left side, trying to get away from him. Even though Kelly liked Miguel a lot more than she liked Tina, she could still sympathize with the girl's plight. Miguel was all over her, as usual. He couldn't stop pawing her for a second. Kelly had once tried suggesting to him that he should ease up on Tina and try being less possessive, but Miguel had gone all huffy and insulted, so she'd dropped it.

Doug's map-reading technique wasn't the only thing slowing them down. First her friends had taken forever to shower, dress, and pack. Then Tina had insisted they stop for bathroom pit stops twice. And *then* Tina made them stop at a supermarket where she bought all kinds of food and supplies.

Going out into the woods with jumbo bags of Cheez Doodles and six-packs of diet soda seemed bush-league to Kelly, and she couldn't resist saying so. She explained to Tina how she and Boone used to go off for weeks at a time, living out in the woods, exploring. Each time they took fewer and fewer supplies. Boone said he had read somewhere that if you had a blanket and a knife, you should be able to survive anywhere in the world.

"Oh, don't worry," Tina had answered with a bright smile. "I'm not sharing!" Then she took out a purple Flair pen and started writing TC—for Tina Chen—on all the bags and packages.

Right in the middle of the supermarket, Kelly had let out a belly laugh. And once she had started laughing, she couldn't stop. It must

have been lack of sleep, because it felt like she had lost control of her face muscles. Tina got pretty annoyed, but Kelly couldn't help it. She kept thinking about the evil they were up against. Like Jason would stop to read Tina's initials before he flayed her alive.

It was past five now, the sun low in the sky. It looked as if they were going to drive right to it. Only about two more hours of light left. Nighttime had scared Kelly all year. Darkness at Crystal Lake was going to be even worse.

"Kelly, you want me to spell you on the driving?" Miguel asked from the backseat.

"No thanks, I'm fine."

She was driving on Route 107, still on a paved road, but going through thick woods. She had one hand out the window to keep her cigarette smoke away from Tina, who kept complaining. Through the open window she could smell that clean pine smell that they always tried to imitate when they made bathroom disinfectants. It was the cleanest smell Kelly knew.

But she wasn't feeling the usual release she got when she headed out to the woods. In all the trips and hikes she had taken this year, she had never once gone anywhere near Crystal Lake. Now, every motel or shack they passed struck her as horribly familiar, as if she were coming home for the first time in years. It wasn't that she remembered all these places from the one time she was out here. It was that she knew they were retracing Boone's steps. Going back exactly the way he had gone. Kelly shuddered deeply.

She looked over at Doug. Out cold, he was still a comforting sight. She smiled.

"So tell me more about this Jason dude," Miguel said. "What was that one you were telling me? About that farmer who saw him chowing down on some kid's brains?"

"Miguel," Tina said stiffly, "I think you ought to examine why you get off on this stuff. Seems like you've got some pretty deep sadistic impulses."

"That's right, man. I'm a big sadist. That's why I'm going to pinch you to pieces."

"Miguel, for the last time—get off!"

They made so much commotion that Kelly almost missed it—
A green-and-white glow-in-the-dark sign by the side of the highway. The white words made her heart start to pound.

CRYSTAL LAKE

10 Miles

Miguel and Tina's roughhousing had woken Doug; he sat up, shook his head, and rubbed his face with both hands. "Wow," he said. "I hope we're almost home."

"We haven't even gotten there yet," Tina whined.

"Kell, I'm telling you," Doug said, squinting out the grimy windshield, "you owe us big-time for coming along on this one."

Kelly had begged him *not* to come. But she didn't feel like reminding him. The truth was, she was feeling intensely grateful that they had come along. Most of all, Doug.

As she drove on down Route 107, he reached over and started massaging her neck. "Your muscles are like rock," he told her.

"Is that bad?" she asked with a tiny smile.

Doug. Carly had been extremely unimpressed the couple of times she had met him. And Kelly had to admit their relationship wasn't exactly deep. She knew his reputation, too. He was famous for his wandering eye. But Doug had been there for her all year. Without exaggeration, she felt like his steady presence had saved her life.

You like him, don't you, Boone? she asked in her head.

Suddenly, she jammed on the brakes and skidded toward the side of the road so sharply that everyone in the car was thrown wildly. She hit the horn with all her might.

The blare of the horn mixed with her screams.

The Hitchhiker

Kelly jerked the car to a halt over on the weedy shoulder of the highway. She sat still, her shoulders hunched. The car ticked a few times as the engine died. It was a moment before anyone broke the silence.

"What the hell was that?" Tina finally cried.

Doug whistled. "Boy, I guess you really had to go to the bathroom bad, huh, Kell?"

"What?" Kelly asked. "No—sorry—I—" She banged the door open, hitting it hard with her shoulder.

"Where are you going?" Tina demanded.

"Hey!" Miguel yelled after her.

But she was out of the car already, out into the warm country air, staring back down the road.

The road was deserted. No cars. And no hitchhikers. But she could swear on her life she had seen him. Boone. Standing by the side of the road with his thumb out, that familiar, devilish grin on his face. His long brown hair had hung down in a ponytail like the tail of a coonskin cap.

She had driven right by him. He seemed to loom up at the car as if he were attacking the windshield and then just as suddenly had disappeared from view. But in that flash she had seen his face clearly. It was Boone all right. She was able to recognize him even though his long handsome face was half-rotted.

"Kell?" It was Doug, coming around the front of the car, hands in the pockets of his khaki shorts. "You okay?"

"What's going on?" Miguel said, hurrying toward them. His hands were balled into fists. He moved in that excited loping gait he fell into whenever he expected action.

"I—I thought I saw something," Kelly explained.

"What?" Miguel asked. "Saw what?"

"I don't know." Kelly gave them a tight-lipped smile. "But anyway, I was wrong."

She started back toward the car, but Doug blocked her way. She saw the look passing between him and Miguel. They think I'm insane, Kelly realized.

Nice going, Boone, she said silently. They were already worried about me, now they'll be shopping for a straightjacket.

"What's up?" Doug asked Kelly.

"Nothing, let's get back on the road."

"Right." Doug grinned. "Listen, how about I drive from here?"

Just after six, a short, wiry old man trudged out of the woods outside Ma and Pa's tar-paper shack.

Something about the shack seemed to give the old man pause. He stood in the clearing, chewing thoughtfully on some green pine needles he had pulled off an evergreen branch on the walk over.

Maybe it was that the shack looked so still and quiet.

"Gabe?" he called.

No response. "Ruth? Big Red?" Grumbling, the old man started forward.

It had been a humid day, still was, even at this hour, and Tuck was sweating dark half-moons under the arms of his yellow flannel shirt. He wasn't sorry he had worn the shirt, though. He liked to wear bright colors whenever he walked through the woods. He'd seen plenty of hunting accidents around Crystal Lake. Hikers, tourists, campers—bang! shot dead, just like that. Hey, the last few years, it seemed like hunters were no longer aiming at the deer.

Gabe was one of Tuck's oldest friends. Tuck, Gabe, and Bud Gleason had been hunting and fishing and drinking together since they were teenagers. Usually, when they'd been out on a tear the night before (as the three of them had last night), Gabe came by Tuck's cottage to wake him the next morning.

Tuck relied on Gabe for these wake-up visits. He ran a little fish and bait business out by Sawmill Road. If he didn't get out to the

shop early, he missed out on any tourists who needed worms and tackle and such.

Not that business had been any too good these last few years. What with the rumors. Folks said that Crystal Lake was the site of the Devil's gateway. Tuck believed it.

He knocked on the flimsy wooden door to the shack, and still getting no response, yanked the door open.

The shack was empty. The blankets on the three beds were neatly tucked under the sides of the bare mattresses. All looked just like it did everyday.

Except maybe the floor.

The floor was cleaner than usual. Looked like Ruth had scrubbed the whole floor and parts of the walls with water. The wood was still drying.

Tuck sat down at the table. He lifted his old legs with a groan and set his feet in their floppy black fishing boots down slowly on one of the chairs. He sighed. Maybe he'd wait a spell. One of 'em was bound to show up here sooner or later. Maybe Ruth would give him something to eat. He hadn't had anything to eat today except for pine needles, and he didn't have any money on him to buy any real grub. Ruth wasn't too fond of him, but it was worth a shot.

Tuck was a short little man, over seventy. He wore his yellow-white hair cropped close. Still, he gave the impression of being awfully hairy, what with his white whiskers, the hair growing over his neck and out of his ears. Peeking out of the breast pocket of his yellow flannel shirt was a small bottle of gin, which Tuck now extracted. After a long swig, he wiped his mouth on his shoulder. The gesture turned his head to the side, and his glance happened to fall on—

The bookshelf. Right over his head. He stared at it. Then he got up and stared at it some more.

Something was wrong with that bookshelf, though Tuck couldn't quite place what.

Well, now hold on there. For one thing, the shelf was crooked. Tuck reached out and fixed that. But there was something else.

Weren't there some cactus plants that Ruth always kept up there? Well, the plants weren't there now.

Scratching his head and puzzling over these odd clues—scrubbed floor, empty shelf—Tuck headed out the shack door. He strolled down to the pigpen to say hi to the hogs before he left. He loved these hogs almost as much as that fool Big Red did.

Delilah, the huge black-and-white sow, was waiting for him when he got there. She was chewing on something. He couldn't see what, 'cause whatever it was, it was all mixed with straw. Delilah stopped chewing when he reached over the fence. He started scratching the short, bristly hairs on her broad back. She stood very still, grunting softly. She watched him with her tiny, shrewd eyes.

Whenever you scratched Delilah, she always stopped eating, no matter how hungry she was. She just loved the feeling so much—loved it more than food. Tuck went on scratching, smiling down at Delilah. "Sweet hog," he said. "Yesss, you are..."

With his head down, he didn't notice Mae, the big pink hog, as she trotted away from the water trough. A female human hand dangled by one finger from the hog's wide mouth.

Advice from Strangers

The sign Kelly had seen said ten miles to Crystal Lake; that was a half hour ago. Since then, it seemed like they'd driven through every tiny town in northern Massachusetts, twice.

Finally, around six-thirty, Doug drove up this hilly dirt road that led past a post office and a couple of old stores. He parked.

"We're here?" Miguel asked, eagerly peering out the window.

"No," Doug said, smiling genially. "We're lost."

"Again?" Tina groaned.

Kelly felt another fit of laughter coming on. The way these guys were acting, it was like classic car-trip mode. And Kelly herself was worrying, in the middle of everything, whether her friends were having a good time. They were headed for a death trap, for God's sake. How much of a good time was that going to be?

"Listen," Kelly said, turning to the others. "I know you don't believe me, but I promise you—things are going to get hairy. So if anyone wants to leave—"

Tina looked like she was about to volunteer, but Miguel immediately said, "Forget it. We're staying."

There was a silence in the car; for Kelly it was fear and foreboding, for the rest of them it looked like it was mainly boredom and gloom.

"So what do we do?" Tina asked. "Just sit here all night?"

"Here's someone we can ask," Kelly said, rolling down her window.

Coming up the sidewalk, weaving slightly in between the two parked cars on the street, was a wiry old man in a yellow flannel shirt. He was wearing these tall floppy fishing boots. He stopped before he got to their car, took out a half-pint bottle of liquor from his breast pocket, and had a long pull.

"Doesn't look too promising," Tina commented.

"Excuse me," Kelly said as the man walked by. "Excuse me? Sir? We're looking for Crystal Lake."

The man stopped short and stared at Kelly coldly. Then he came closer. The man's breath was like an overbearing perfume—he'd obviously been drinking heavily. "What'd you say?"

"I said we're looking for Crystal Lake."

The old man's whiskered face broke into a broad, rotten-toothed grin. "You're here, darlin'."

A chill froze Kelly's spine.

"This is Crystal Lake?" Tina asked from the backseat.

"This is the place." The man gestured with his arms wide. "Beautiful, ain't it? Crystal Lake, population 287 and counting. *Down.*" He wheeze-laughed, then stuck out a hand, forcing Kelly to shake. The man's hand was unpleasantly dry, like snakeskin.

"Name's Tuck," the man said.

"Kelly," Kelly said.

The man nodded, not letting go of her hand. His eyes were both yellowish and bloodshot.

Kelly gently but firmly pulled her hand free, saying, "Hey, guys, guess what? We're here." To the old man she said, "We thought we were lost. Listen, you wouldn't happen to know a place around here where we can get a bite to eat? We're going to the old Crystal Lake campsite later to camp out, you know, but we wanted to get a good meal first."

The old man backed away a few steps as if he hadn't heard right. "You're going *where*?"

"The old campsite," Kelly said.

The man laughed. He shook his head. "You crazy kids want to die tonight, is that the idea?"

"Okay, Kelly," Tina said, "I think we've gotten the information we need, so—"

"Because that's what that place is, it's a death camp." The man leered at Kelly wickedly. "You know how many people been killed around these parts, girl? Any idea? If I was you, I'd turn that little car of yours right around and hightail it back to wherever you come from. Fast."

Miguel leaned forward from the backseat. "Actually, mister, we're going to stick around, see, and kill Jason for you, since no one

around here seems like they can do it themselves."

The old man blinked hard. Then he threw back his head and howled. He laughed so hard he had to hold his stomach. When he was done, he did some coughing. But he had a cure for that handy. He took out his liquor bottle and took another long drink.

"You young people," the old man said bitterly. "You think nothing can happen to you. You think you'll never end up like me, right? Never have to face death in the eye every single lousy morning, noon, and—"

He hawked and spat hard in the dirt. He looked awfully sober, all of a sudden, Kelly thought. There was a brightness in his pasty eyes that hadn't been there a moment earlier. He looked both ways, shiftily, as if he thought someone might be listening in on their conversation.

"Let me tell you something," he growled in his deep and scratchy voice. "I don't know what's wrong with this place, but it's bad, whatever it is. Don't go looking for it, you hear me? 'Cause you look for it, and believe me, it'll find you."

He took out his gin bottle yet again, but this time his face fell as he saw the bottle was empty. He slipped the bottle back in his pocket, spat again. "Well," he said, "nice chatting with you."

He turned to walk away, but he stopped when he got to the sidewalk. He looked back sharply. He obviously had had an idea. He plastered a big smile over his worn features as he shuffled back toward Kelly's open window. "Say," he said, "listen, since I gave you such good advice, how about helping out an old fellow with a couple of bucks? They won't give me nothing at the diner, say I owe them for the last—Whadda ya say? Couple of bucks? A buck? How about some change?"

"Sorry," Doug said from behind the wheel. "We're broke ourselves. How about lending us some money? Ha-ha."

It happened fast.

Just then, the old man reached in through the open window and closed his powerful little hand right around Kelly's throat.

Baiting the Trap

"Give it to me!" he demanded. "You lousy little brats!"

Kelly was choking. Her hands were around the old man's wrist, trying to pull his hand off, but he was surprisingly strong, and he had caught her unawares.

Moving fast, Miguel lurched forward from the backseat and chopped the old man's wrist with the straight edge of his rigid palm, karate style. The man screamed and pulled his hand back. He held it against his chest.

"Now back off, man," Miguel warned him.

Kelly was rubbing her throat.

"You okay?" Tina asked her.

She nodded. "Yeah." Her voice was hoarse.

The old man was working his hand, trying to get the feeling back into it. "See what this place makes you do?" he rasped. "I'm not myself, I'll tell you that right now."

And then he was gone, scuttling off down the sidewalk.

"Well, I've seen enough," Doug said mildly. "How about we turn around and go home?"

"Good idea," Kelly said. "You guys go. I'll be fine, I promise." She popped the glove compartment and took out a blue towel, which she unfolded carefully on her lap. Inside lay a black pistol.

Everyone in the car started talking at once. Tina was going on about whether or not Kelly had a license, and telling Doug to take the gun away from her. Doug was yelling at Kelly to put the gun away, and Miguel was begging to see the gun up close.

Instead, Kelly slipped the pistol into one of the side pockets of her jacket. "Look, guys, I may be crazy, but I'm not dumb. You think I'd take us out here unarmed?"

She started to get out of the car, but Tina reached through the space between the seats to touch her arm. Her pretty face was drawn

with worry. "Why'd you tell him where we were going to be staying? That's like so insane. A guy like that. Who knows what he could do?"

"No way," Miguel said. "You see the way I handled him?"

"Yeah," Tina said sourly. "You beat up an old man, very impressive. I'm serious, Kelly. What's the matter with you? And you, Miguel. Why'd you go blabbing all that stuff about Jason?"

"I thought you said that was all made up," Miguel answered, his dark eyes sparkling.

"Sure it is," Tina said. "I know that, you know that, but these townspeople don't know it, I'm sure. They're probably all inbred lunatics. Go around saying Jason to them, who knows what could happen?"

"No," Kelly said, "that's exactly what I want to do." She twisted her neck from side to side; she could still feel the old man's bony fingers pressing into her soft flesh.

"Do what?" Doug asked, looking confused.

"I want to spread the word around," Kelly explained.

Tina looked appalled. "*Why?*"

Kelly pushed the car door open wide and put one foot out onto the pavement. "We're baiting the trap, Tina. We're baiting the trap."

Big Red felt trapped in the tiny chair. He was jammed behind the desk in Uncle Tuck's fishing shop, huge hands folded on the desktop. If it weren't for his tremendous size and the white hockey mask on his face, he might have been a little boy waiting to be scolded by the school principal.

Which is exactly how he felt.

He'd been waiting for Uncle Tuck for over an hour. He intended to tell Uncle Tuck what he had done to Ma and Pa and let Uncle Tuck yell at him and get it over with. He didn't think he could stand waiting much longer.

Breathing loudly through the black mouth hole in the mask, he stared at the fancy fishing rods that lined the wall. Uncle Tuck let Big

Red use one of these fancy rods each morning. Uncle Tuck was so nice to Big—

He froze. He had just remembered again what he had remembered that morning. The scene in the shack. *Uncle Bud and Uncle Tuck*. They hadn't tried to protect him from Pa when Pa got so mad with the iron.

The V-shaped cleft in Big Red's big bald head started to itch.

Red tried to force himself to think about how nice Uncle Tuck had been. Uncle Tuck had also given him a heavy-duty fishing line. Said it was strong enough line to haul in the biggest fish in Crystal Lake. But the way Tuck was laughing when he said it...

Maybe Tuck didn't think Big Red would ever catch anything. Maybe that was all part of the way he made fun of—

The dent in Big Red's head felt like it was burning bright red. He shook himself, trying to shake away the bad thoughts. He didn't want to have any more of that hate. It would just get him into worse trouble. He sure didn't want to remember what had happened when —

Big Red stood quickly, letting out a low moan. He put his hands over his mask. He didn't want to see.

But the images his glass eye were showing him were internal, and he couldn't block them out.

He was only twelve, but already he was almost as tall as Pa. He had a bushy head of bright red hair. He was all excited because Pa said he could come with Uncle Bud and Uncle Tuck on their hunting trip.

At first the trip was fun, and everyone was in a good mood. But then the men had started drinking. And drinking. As the day wore on they started getting meaner, too. They didn't catch any deer, which made them angry. They said it was all Big Red's fault, said he made too much noise when he walked.

Big Red tried to be quiet. But then he would forget and start clapping his hands and singing. So then Uncle Tuck—

Big Red started banging his head hard against the wall of the shack as he tried to drive out the memory. But the memory kept coming.

It was dusk. Uncle Tuck was working to get his arrow out of the trunk of a birch tree after missing a big deer with huge antlers.

"That's the last deer you make me miss, boy," Uncle Tuck said to Big Red. "You make one more noise, one more little squeak, and Uncle Tuck is going to start hunting *you*."

Big Red remembered how confused he had felt. Because Uncle Tuck was smiling when he said this. Like it was a joke. So Big Red smiled too. So did Uncle Bud and Pa. But they looked mad.

"You think I'm joking, don't you, boy?" Uncle Tuck asked. "I'll show you how I'm joking. C'mon," he said to the other men. "Let's see if we can bag a Big Red."

Uncle Bud laughed out loud. So did Pa.

"No, please," Big Red said softly. He stuck out his big lower lip. "Don't tease," he pleaded. He felt a large tear roll down his cheek.

Then Uncle Tuck said, "I'll count to ten. Then I'm coming after you."

He started counting. At the same time, he was pulling an arrow out of his quiver. Big Red ran. He had long legs, two real ones back then. But he was clumsy. He kept falling. He didn't get very far away from Uncle Tuck before he heard Tuck call out "ten" loud and clear.

Big Red turned and stared back at the three men. Uncle Tuck had the arrow drawn back in his bow. He was aiming right at him. Big Red was so scared he couldn't move. And then—

Whoosh—

Thwock.

The arrow struck him right in the eye.

Big Red was screaming now, staggering around Uncle Tuck's Fish & Bait shop. His glass eye was screaming too, screaming with pain. The same pain he had felt in his eye on that misty evening so many years ago, that evening in the woods.

Big Red was angry. Very angry. He was also listening carefully. Because there was a voice in his head now. A voice that told him exactly what he should do. Seemed like a good plan, too.

He was finally going to catch a fish.

Not a Living Soul

"This town sure is lively," Doug told Kelly. "I can see why you were dying to come back here."

"Damn," Kelly said. It was almost seven, and none of the stores in the teensy town of Crystal Lake seemed to be open. Other than that old drunk, they hadn't run into a single living soul.

Miguel and Tina had gone off exploring down the hill. Kelly could see them from where she and Doug were standing. Miguel was chasing Tina around the town flagpole. Tina was yelling at him to leave her alone.

Kelly crossed her arms, trying to think, trying to figure out what to do.

"Kell." Doug was grinning at her. "You want to tell me what you saw on the highway?"

She shook her head no. Not only didn't she want to tell, she also didn't want to think what it meant about her sanity that she had seen a ghost. Besides, she was willing to go psychotic if it meant she could spend some more time with her older brother.

"Hellooo?" Doug said. "Anybody home?"

"Sorry," Kelly said. "I keep spacing."

"Tell me about it." He shrugged, then gently punched her shoulder. "Don't worry about it," he said. That was one of the things that made it possible for Kelly to keep going out with Doug. He was easy on her. If she wanted to be remote and distant, he seemed to feel that that was her business.

He loped on up the sidewalk, then stopped, looking off to his right. "Perfect," he said. He waited till she had caught up with him. He was smiling. He took her hand. "Over here."

He led her into the brick alley between two buildings. There was nothing back there but some grass and a few broken bottles. "What?" Kelly asked.

Doug was giving her that gentle look of his, the one that always made her want to pat him like a puppy. He guided her up against the wall. "What?" she asked again, but she said it more softly this time. She knew what.

"You're going to get it," Doug said.

She smiled as he pressed himself up against her; he braced his hands against the wall over her head, covering her body with his. She tilted her face up to meet his. She opened her mouth slightly as his lips found hers. Then her hands, as if operating on their own, went around his neck and her fingers worked their way into the soft curls of dark hair at the base of his scalp.

The kiss felt great, like a healing balm pouring into her body through the mouth. The kiss also relaxed her, and as soon as she relaxed, she could feel it—the utter exhaustion that lurked just below the surface, ready to swallow her up. It was as if her own body were talking to her. Wouldn't it be great if she could just give in to Doug? her body asked. Then she could rest—really rest, for the first time in months. Instead of tossing and turning. Just sleep and sleep and sleep...

Doug let out a happy grunt as his hands started popping the brass snaps on her jacket. And then—suddenly—it all came back to her, why she couldn't rest.

She put her own hands on his chest and pushed him back. She shook her head. "Not now," she said.

He studied her gray-blue eyes. "Why not? It's such a romantic spot."

She laughed, then lowered her eyes. "Doug," she said. "I'm sorry I've been... such a head case." Head case? If she told him who she'd seen hitchhiking on Route 107, he'd think she was a lot worse than that.

"That's okay," he said, brown eyes twinkling. "I know just the way you can make it up to me."

He pressed forward, leaning down for another kiss, but she held him back, turning her head so that he almost kissed the mossy brick wall. "Stop!" she said.

Doug stopped. He backed off, shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He tried to smile, but Kelly could tell he was hurt. This was the one area in their relationship where Doug tended to be less easygoing and forgiving.

"Sorry," she said, "but Crystal Lake is like the last place on earth that's going to put me in the mood. You can understand that, can't you?"

"Sure."

Neither one said anything for a moment. The mood was certainly shot, and Kelly couldn't help regretting it. She studied his face. "You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"Naw. Just because you want to catch some monster?"

That stung. Kelly knew that Doug didn't believe the whole Jason business; it made her feel awfully alone.

"You'll see," she said, "once this is over..."

"Uh huh."

"I'm serious. When I'm happy, I'm like a wild woman."

"Right."

"I'm telling you, Doug. Before Boone—"

She stopped, looked down. She couldn't go on.

"I know," Doug said irritably. "Before your brother's accident, you were just this happy-go-lucky love machine. But as luck would have it, it's only when you're around me that you're cold as a fish."

This was so insulting that it almost helped her, like a slap in the face that brought someone out of a state of shock. Talking about Boone had almost started her crying. Now her head cleared and she looked at Doug levelly.

"I didn't ask you to come up here. You can go home any time you like."

"Great," Doug said. "That's a big help." He stomped out of the alley.

Kelly pushed off the wall with a sigh. Out in the street, she found him kicking around a dented Dr Pepper can. Kelly called down to Miguel and Tina, who looked like they were now having a big argument of their own. When the two teenagers heard Kelly yelling,

they both peered up the hill blankly, like they had forgotten all about her.

"No luck?" Miguel asked as he came up the hill.

"No luck whatsoever," Doug said with an angry glance at Kelly.

"Good," Tina said. And then to Kelly she said, "Had enough?" She looked back at Miguel and added, "I know *I* have."

Great, Kelly thought. Everyone's getting along just beautifully. "There's got to be something open," she said. She turned and walked farther up the hill. "I seem to remember that there was this—"

She stopped short. A few buildings up ahead a door had just opened. A policeman came out. He was a big huge fullback of a guy with a bristly black mustache. Without looking in Kelly's direction, the big man lumbered casually toward his cruiser. Kelly didn't want the cop to see her; she stood stock-still, as if somehow that might make her less conspicuous. It worked. The cop got into his car without looking back.

But what Kelly was thinking about was that open door, where the cop had just come from.

"This way," she said eagerly.

When she glanced back at the rest of the group, no one seemed to be sharing in her enthusiasm. But at least they were following.

Tuck kept grumbling to himself all the way back to the Fish & Bait. Darlene, that buxom new waitress at Denny's Diner, really needed to be taught a lesson or two. Who did she think she was, not letting him get some food on credit? And those lousy rich kids in the Volvo—*tourists, flatlanders*. So high and mighty, wouldn't lend him a dirty nickel.

His stomach rumbled angrily. The pangs of hunger were beginning to gnaw at his insides, as if he'd swallowed all these little creatures and they needed to be fed.

Well, he knew how to feed them. That was the lucky thing. That was what had gotten him through so many lean patches over the

years. There was never—and never would be—a more skillful fisherman than old Tuck, if he did say so himself.

He picked out one of the finest rods he owned, an Eagle Claw Black Eagle. He paused before the case of metal flies.

No way. He was too hungry to give himself a test of his fishing skills. He'd use live bait, not the fake metal and plastic stuff.

Warming to his task, Tuck hummed to himself as he hiked through the woods down to the edge of the lake. The mosquitoes were fierce, buzzing around like flying needles. But Tuck didn't mind. After a life spent on the lake, his skin was as tough as the leather on a football.

He just prayed that Big Red had left his old rowboat where he was supposed to.

Sure enough, there it was, pulled all the way up into the reeds the way Tuck had taught him. That Big Red was all right.

Instead of pushing his old white rowboat out into the water, Tuck sat down on the sandy bank and pulled off one of his wading boots. Then he took off his sock and tossed it on the ground. He rolled up his pants leg as far as it would go, until the pressure of the cuff around his thigh began to bother him. His naked leg looked old and hairy and weak. But that was the nice thing about leeches. They still found Tuck attractive.

"Come and get it, my lovelies," muttered Tuck as he waded out into the lake.

It seemed like the leeches had been getting more and more plentiful in Crystal Lake the last few years. And bigger, too! Five and six inches long, some of them. Folks said the lake was cursed. Tuck knew better. The more leeches the better.

He stood out as deep as he could. Stood stock-still. It helped if you didn't move around. He waited. And waited. He didn't feel a thing, except the cold water as it swirled and tingled around his naked skin. That didn't mean anything. You never felt much besides these little tickles. The leeches had something like an anaesthetic in their mouths, so that when they bit you, you didn't even know it.

Sure enough, when Tuck finally climbed back onto shore, his leg was dotted with long slimy black worms, their wet backs glistening in the fading light. Calm as could be, Tuck lit a cigarette. Then he

touched the glowing red ember tip of it to the back of one leech after another, enjoying the little hissing sound as the leech flesh burned.

That was another thing about the leeches these days. They didn't let go so easily. He had to hold the cigarette to their skin for a long time, burning deep into each leech's body, before he heard the pop as the worm released its big suckers.

He had brought along a rusty Maxwell House coffee can to collect the bait. He had collected almost half the leeches from his leg when he saw the dollar bill.

It was sitting right there on the grass, just up the bank, right near the edge of the woods. It moved about gently in the breeze.

Tuck blinked. His eyes were playing tricks on him, he was sure. There was no way that he was really seeing what he was seeing, a dollar bill just lying right there for him to take.

But it was. And now he was moving sprightly up the bank, a funny sight with his one pants leg all rolled up. The dollar moved just as he got there, jerking back slightly. He bent down and grabbed for it, closing his fist around the bill hard. As he squeezed, the three-pronged hook that was stuck into the bill dug deep—*deep*—into the meat of his palm.

In that first instant, he was too stunned to know what had happened. He just stared at his closed fist as if puzzled. He could see the bill sticking out the sides of his fingers. And then a spurt of red blood.

And then—

The bill—and his hand—jerked forward. He was yanked so hard he lost his balance. As he fell his head hit a rock. He didn't have time to think about that. Because now his arm shot straight out ahead of him again. He was being dragged into the dark of the forest. And as he slid across the ground, he caught his first confused glimpse of what was dragging him.

It was a huge man in blue overalls and a white hockey mask. The man had a fishing rod—Big Red?

Tuck jerked forward again, his face scraping hard against the jagged edge of a tree stump.

Whoever it was, the huge man was reeling him in like a fish.

Denny's Diner

The plastic sign hanging in the door of Denny's Diner said *Welcome*. Kelly pushed the door open, jangling the bell. There was no one inside.

The diner was small, just a few white, square Formica tables pushed up against one wall. Along the other side ran the counter; its five metal stools all had old red-leather cushions. Overhead, a metal fan spun soundlessly, but nothing in the room seemed to be moving, not even the air. Everything in the place, from the hand-lettered signs on the walls to the scallop-edged paper placemats, looked old and dusty, something out of the fifties, not the present.

"Hello?" Kelly called. She had the unpleasant feeling that everyone might have cleared out of Crystal Lake just before she arrived—upped and run, with the instincts of animals before a hurricane strikes.

"Great, no one here," Tina said.

"Ayup," Doug said, scratching his head and doing a backwoods yokel act. "It sure is mighty quiet like. But lookey here, looks like victuals."

With Tina laughing and applauding like he was the funniest man she'd ever seen, Doug did a silly bowlegged walk over to the counter where a plastic tray was laden with a pyramid of chocolate-glazed donuts. He lifted the tray's domed lid and was reaching for a donut when—

"Caught ya," said a voice from the kitchen door.

The waitress, who looked to be about thirty, had wavy red hair, and her lips were lipsticked to match. She was wearing a tight pink uniform that seemed to be having trouble staying on over her curvy body. The buttons on her ample chest looked like they were about to pop. So did Doug's eyes.

The waitress was chewing a big wad of lime-green gum that kept appearing between her full red lips as she moved it from one side of

her mouth to the other. "What can I get you young folks?"

"Wow," Doug said, admiringly. "Before I saw you, I thought I wanted a donut, but *now*..." He let the idea trail off.

"Oh, now, you!" The waitress giggled behind a hand that had a ring on every finger and bright red polish on every nail.

Doug asked, "You still... serving?"

Watching Doug flirt... it made Kelly's heart sink right down into her hiking boots. He's just getting me back for being so cold in the alleyway, she told herself. But it didn't help.

"Well now," the waitress said, "the cook's gone home and I was just about to close up, but if you're hungry, I'll stay open." More giggling. "I can cook for you myself."

Doug stared at the waitress for a moment, then he whistled. "My friends," he told the group, "I think our trip is looking up."

"Here we go," Miguel muttered, shaking his head in disgust. He started pacing up and down the diner, doing these loud stretches, cracking his joints. "Now we'll be here all night," he grumbled.

Kelly slouched down into a seat at one of the tables along the wall. Her heart was pounding. All she could think was, He's doing it right in front of me.

Throughout the year, she'd had people warning her about what a flirt Doug was. But Doug had promised her he would never cheat on her, and she had believed him. And she'd never even caught him flirting, not really. Now, for the first time since she and Doug had started going out, she realized just how much it meant to her for Doug not to betray her—ever.

Doug gave Kelly a sideways glance, as if to make sure she was watching, then he told the waitress, "Where do we sit if we want to be sure *you* wait on us?"

More high-pitched giggling from the buxom woman. "Oh, well, now, as you can see, we're kind of empty, so anywhere you like."

Tina pulled on Doug's hand, pulling him toward Kelly's table. "C'mon," she told him in a low voice.

Tina didn't seem to like Doug's flirting any more than Kelly did. Kelly's eyes zoomed in like a telephoto lens on Tina's tiny hand, holding Doug's. It was like in the movies when they wanted to show

you some important clue, like a gun on a shelf that was going to go off later.

Doug, Miguel, and Tina all joined her at the table, and the waitress handed out the greasy vinyl-covered menus. Doug said, "Thanks, uh..." He squinted up at her, reading the little black-and-white name tag pinned to her blouse. "Thanks, *Betsey*."

The waitress grinned back at him toothily. She took a small ordering pad out of her uniform's front pocket and a pencil from behind her ear and stood waiting for them to choose what they wanted. "By the way," she told Doug, "my name's not Betsey. I know it says that on my tag, but that's because I just took over this job. I'm not from Crystal Lake, see. I'm from Holloway, about ten miles up the road. My name's Darlene."

Doug stuck out his hand. Kelly tried not to stare, but she couldn't help it. Her eyes did another close-up as Doug shook hands with Darlene. He didn't make it a quick handshake, either. "Pleased to meet ya," Doug said.

"What happened to Betsey?" Tina asked grumpily.

Darlene blushed and looked down at her order pad. "Oh, you guys aren't from around here?"

"No," Kelly said. A vague memory was stirring somewhere deep in her brain. A clipping in her notebook. Wasn't there a Betsey? She sat up straight. "Wait a minute, was this Betsey Doyle?"

The waitress looked surprised, then suspicious. "Now how did you know that? And here you were teasing me that you weren't from around here."

"We're not," Kelly said. "I read about it." To her friends she said, "Betsey Doyle wanted to save money by living in this shack out in the woods. Right by the old campsite. Jason hacked her to pieces."

"Oh, now," the waitress said, "don't start spreading that rumor and scaring your friends. See, they never found out who done it."

"Oh, that's much better news," Doug said.

"Yeah," the waitress agreed with a sigh. She cracked her wad of gum. "This town, I'll tell ya. It's trouble, all right."

"I'm so glad I came on this trip," Tina muttered, resting her head in her hand. "Get off," she added, as Miguel reached behind her and

started braiding her long black hair.

"Sorry." Miguel started nervously stroking his wispy mustache. "Hey, Kelly, don't you want to tell Darlene what we're up to?"

One thing Miguel was not was subtle. Kelly had wanted to drop the information into the conversation casually; so much for that. She told Darlene where they'd be staying, and why.

Darlene cut a quick glance at Doug, but then her face went all bored and blank. "That's nice," she said.

Nice? thought Kelly, after what they had just been talking about? Was this woman a total airhead, or what?

Kelly ordered a cup of black coffee and a stack of pancakes. She felt too keyed up to eat, but she knew she better force something down. Everyone else seemed to be starving from their car trip; they were ordering everything on the menu from milkshakes to burgers to home fries.

But no one's mood improved, even after Darlene brought the food. Tina kept waving her hand right in Kelly's face, to shoo away her cigarette smoke. Miguel kept drumming the tabletop with both hands. "Cut it out, will you?" Tina asked him. "You're making me nervous."

Miguel laughed, but his smile looked fake. "Nervous, huh? I told you guys she's scared."

Tina didn't bother to answer. To Doug she said, "He's driving me crazy."

"Hey, Miguel," Doug said casually, "you better lay off her. We can't have two crazy people on this trip, right?"

"Thanks a lot," Kelly said. She tried to smile, but it was as if the sides of her mouth wouldn't go all the way up.

"You're welcome," Doug said; as usual, *he* had no problem smiling. He looked down at Tina's hand, the one she wasn't eating with, which was resting on the speckled Formica tabletop. "Hey," he said, "that's a beautiful ring."

It *was* a nice ring—silver, with a snake's head biting its own tail—but Kelly knew that Doug couldn't care less about it. His compliment was just an excuse to pick up Tina's hand, hold it, as he "admired" the jewelry. Tina blushed.

"Hey," Miguel said.

Doug let go of Tina's hand, then picked up his fork and lifted another heaping helping of mashed potatoes, gravy, and peas toward his mouth.

"I've also got this silver pendant you might like," Tina said, unbuttoning the top button of her lacy white blouse. Doug's fork froze in midair.

"Hey," Miguel said again, louder this time.

"I'm just showing him," Tina said softly. She lifted out the pendant and Doug leaned right across the table to stare at it, which meant he put his face about an inch from Tina's.

Kelly felt the waves of heat rolling over her body from head to toe. This was the last thing she needed right now. "Doug," she said softly. She added a silent "please," saying it only with her eyes.

He looked at her blankly, but he sat back.

"What is it with you?" Miguel said to Tina, glowering.

"What is it with *you*?"

"Oh, that's mature."

Kelly groaned. Her hands went to her head. All at once, the pain was knifing into her—her old friend, the migraine was back and stronger than ever.

"Headache?" Doug asked. He looked more annoyed than sympathetic. She nodded mutely as she fumbled for her Tylenol bottle in the breast pocket of her army jacket.

Doug smiled at Tina and Miguel. "Most girls wait till you try something before they claim they've got a headache. Kelly doesn't take any chances. She's *always* got a headache."

"C'mon," Miguel said, getting to his feet. "Let's blow this joint. I want to get started doing some serious fighting." Miguel threw a few punches, then mimed an imaginary machine gun with his hands and sprayed the empty diner.

Tina cackled. Her mood certainly seemed to have improved since Doug started admiring her jewelry, Kelly observed. "My little Rambo," Tina said.

"That's right," Miguel said without smiling. "Come on, guys. This is going to be fun."

Kelly shook her head, thinking, They still don't get it, Boone. *Fun?* They were in for fun, all right. But it wasn't the kind of fun these guys were talking about.

Am I right, Boone? she asked silently. Am I right?

It wasn't until they were back in the car, driving out toward the old abandoned campsite, that Boone finally answered her.

Visiting the Dead

"You're right, Kell," Boone said sadly. "They don't know what they're in for."

Boone said it right out loud.

Kelly was sitting in the front seat, riding shotgun, as Boone used to call it. At the sound of her brother's deep voice—a voice so familiar!—she turned around fast. Which meant she stuck her face right into Tina's face, since Tina was sitting right behind her and leaning her head on the back of Kelly's headrest.

Tina gasped. "What's the matter with you?"

"Scared! Scared! Tina's scared!" Miguel cried; then he laughed wildly. "Cool, heh-heh-heh! Cool, heh-heh-heh!"

"Would you stop with that Beavis and Butthead crap?" Tina shouted at him. "I'm sick of it!"

Kelly wasn't listening. She was staring at the tall twenty-one-year-old with the brown hair who was squinched into the backseat between Miguel and Tina. Boone was grinning back at Kelly with his half-rotted face.

"That's right, Kell," he said, "they can't see me. They can't hear me. But you can, can't you, Kell?"

She nodded slightly, tears welling in her gray-blue eyes. She didn't feel like she was going insane; she just felt so glad to see him, and so sad at the same time. She smiled and mouthed the word *Boone*.

"Well," Boone said with that cocky grin of his, "aren't you going to say something? I mean, it's been a while, you know?"

"Yes," Kelly said out loud. "It has."

Tina stopped in the middle of her argument with Miguel and gave her a look. "Yes it has what?" Tina studied Kelly's face. "What are you looking at?"

Tina snapped her fingers in front of Kelly's face, breaking her concentration. Kelly shook her head, turning to focus on the pretty

Japanese girl. Then she looked back at Boone. But he was gone.

"Guys," Tina said, "I think Kelly's gone bye-bye."

"Gone bye-bye?" Doug said from behind the wheel. "Tina, I hate when you throw around those big psychology terms and try to impress us."

"Seriously," Tina said. "Kelly, I think you really need help."

"Oh, I know I do," Kelly said with a limp smile. She kept glancing back at the empty space on the backseat where Boone had sat. Now there was only the silver buckle of an unused seat belt and a squashed box of Kleenex that Miguel had sat on. Her brother had left her again.

"I'm not kidding," Tina said. "I think if you're not careful, you could be heading for a total breakdown."

"I think you're right," Kelly agreed softly. She turned back in her seat, staring straight ahead at the dirt road and the woods.

Doug was driving along this bumpy dirt road. The road was narrow. It looked as if the thick woods were slowly pressing together from both sides, trying to suffocate them. Low-hanging branches kept smacking the windshield, or tapping the roof—like the fingers of monsters trying to get into the car.

"What's the matter with you?" Miguel said to Tina. "Why do you keep picking on her?"

"I'm not picking on her, I'm telling her the truth. I'm concerned."

"Right," Miguel said.

"Look, she stays up half the night, she doesn't eat, she smokes, she goes off into the woods—"

"We're all going off into the woods," Doug chimed in amiably.

"Those are symptoms," Tina insisted.

Kelly slumped against the window, trying to keep her face hidden. She was crying again. Boone had been in the car. Spoken to her! If only she'd spoken to *him* more, maybe he would have stayed.

"Turn left here," she directed Doug, trying to keep the sound of her crying out of her voice. "And right."

She didn't know how she remembered the way, but she did.

And two minutes later, they drove up to the old abandoned cabins of Camp Crystal Lake.

"Now let's see, what else?"

Jessie Gleason nervously tapped her chin with her forefinger. "Little Billy's got two extra bottles in the fridge. If he wakes up and cries, just heat one up until it's warm to the touch—you know, when you drop some on your wrist—Well, what am I saying? You know what to do, right?"

"Sure," said Bud. The old man was sitting at the kitchen table of his son's large wooden-frame house in the woods, trying to seem like he was paying attention as his daughter-in-law went through her endless instructions.

His son, Bud junior, lived in the heart of the woods outside Cranville, which was an hourlong hike through the thick woods from Crystal Lake. Bud had spent the whole day lying around his shack, waiting for his old drinking buddies, Gabe and Tuck, to show up. When they still hadn't shown by evening time, he couldn't take it anymore. He had left them a note saying where he'd be, then trekked over to visit Bud junior, hoping for a handout or at least some food.

He had gotten the food, but if he wanted any money, his son had told him, he would have to work for it. The nerve! The gall! Why, the very house he was sitting in—Bud had helped his son build it; so had Gabe and Tuck. But now Bud junior wanted him to baby-sit. *Baby-sit*. It had come down to this.

Jessie was droning on. "Cassie and James can watch TV until nine," she said, "but nothing too violent. That stuff warps their minds, if you ask me. And at nine sharp, they have to go to bed. They'll mind you if you tell them what to do, but you have to be firm."

"I'll be firm," Bud said. He noticed that his hands were shaking slightly, and set one hand on top of the other.

Jessie stared at him intently. He tried to meet her gaze.

Bud knew he wasn't looking so well. He wasn't feeling so well either. He hadn't had a drop to drink since last night. When he had

looked at his face in the jagged piece of glass he used for a mirror in his cabin, his old crumpled face had had this haunted quality.

"You're okay with this, right?" Jessie asked.

"Sure," Bud said. What did she want him to say?

Jessie smiled, apparently relieved. "It's just so great for me and Buddy," she said, "we almost never get to go to the movies."

Bud forced himself to smile back, and the worry lines in Jessie's forehead finally eased.

She was worrying about the wrong thing.

Out in the woods—

Big Red stood watching the whole scene, breathing noisily and heavily through the round mouth hole in the mask.

Bud junior's house was a two-story wooden building with a porch deck that jutted out into the woods. The porch was off the kitchen, and through the yellow-lighted square of the kitchen window, Red could see Uncle Bud sitting at the table. He could see Jessie talking to him, smiling at him, waving her hands. It was like watching a show on TV.

Big Red slowly turned his massive head. He could see into the living room as well. Could see Bud junior locking up the liquor cabinet, glancing around nervously, then pocketing the key.

Big Red shifted his huge weight back and forth on his big bare feet—one real, one hard blue Lucite—as if he had to go to the bathroom bad. He was in so much trouble. He was in twice as much trouble as before. He counted the deaths on his huge thick fingers. First Pa, then Ma, then Tuck. Why that was five whole murders!

Uncle Bud was the only person he knew that he could go to for help. Pa had always said that if Big Red got lost or in trouble and Pa wasn't around, he should look for Uncle Tuck or Uncle Bud. Pa said he could trust these two men with his life.

But what about—

Big Red stomped his real foot down hard, trying to block out the bad memories. It hurt, stepping down hard like that on the pinecones and burrs and pebbles. But Red didn't care. The important thing was that he wasn't going to think about those bad memories, wasn't going to lose his temper and be a bad boy ever again.

A few minutes later, there was a loud motor sound, then a pair of headlights beamed into the woods, only a few yards from where Big Red stood. And then the lights and the motor sound receded, and he caught a glimpse of Jessie and Bud junior driving away.

Still, Big Red waited. Finally, he realized the coast must be clear. He started forward, picking his way through the brush and deadfall of old branches. He climbed the steps to the porch deck and peered in through the screen.

He could see Cassie and James, the six- and four-year-old, sitting in front of the TV. They looked so cute in their peejays, their hair all wet and combed from the bath.

Big Red slid the door open and stepped inside. Cassie and James turned around.

Their mouths dropped open. They jumped to their feet. "Big Red!" squealed Cassie with delight.

"You're wearing a mask!" James yelled. He giggled.

"He's a monster," Cassie said, clapping her hands.

Big Red had forgotten about the mask. Before the bad trouble started, he had loved playing with these kids. "Monster" was their favorite game. They would make Big Red chase them throughout the house, and when he caught them, he would tickle them all over. He loved that game. But he didn't have time to play with the kids now. He had to find Bud. He strode into the room.

"Run!" Cassie shouted, pulling James along with her. "It's the monster!"

Big Red stomped through the living room into the kitchen—no Bud. The two kids were really getting into the game. Every time he came into another room, Cassie and James would scream again, as if he had found them, then run.

Red clomped up the front steps, the kids falling all over themselves and giggling hysterically as they tried to climb the stairs backward and stay out of his way.

Where was Bud? Where?! Big Red was sweating heavily now. He was getting desperate. What if Bud had left in the car with Jessie and Bud junior?

Red tried the parents' bedroom, then the kids' bedroom. When he flicked on the lights in the baby's room, little Billy started crying in his crib.

Oh, no, thought Big Red. Now he had done another bad thing.

He picked up the baby and tried to quiet it, rocking him gently in his arms.

The baby was a sweet little thing in diapers. He was bald, just like Big Red.

James and Cassie were tugging on his free hand, trying to get him to swing them around, when—

He heard it. From down in the basement. The first sharp whine of the chain saw.

So that's where Bud was. He was down in his son's workroom.

Bud liked to work down there sometimes, making things like shelves and dollhouses and—

The sweat was pouring off Big Red now. The scream of the chain saw rose up through the house and then wound itself into Big Red's ears and into his brain like a snake. His glass eye began to spin and his big head to loll.

He was remembering.

He was fourteen. Pa and Uncle Tuck and Uncle Bud were doing some construction. Uncle Bud was using the chain saw to saw lumber. They let Big Red watch. Big Red wanted to use the chain saw. He begged and begged. But Ma told Uncle Bud that he must not let Big Red touch that dangerous machine.

And Bud obeyed. But then Ma had to go to town. And by then, Uncle Bud and Tuck and Pa had done quite a bit of drinking. They even let Big Red drink some. He drank a whole bottle. That made them laugh real hard. But it made Red feel all woozy and sick.

And then an amazing thing happened. Uncle Bud said Big Red could try the chain saw after all, but he'd have to be quick about it, have to do it before Ma got back.

The accident happened as Red cut his very first piece of lumber. He sawed cleanly through the lumber. And his leg.

Right now, James and Cassie were clinging to his artificial leg, like they were trying to pull it off.

And the baby, Billy, was still bawling in the crook of his arm.

And Big Red was mad all over again. So mad his chest was heaving up and down with the force of the awful feeling.

Usually he had trouble maneuvering his artificial leg. But right now the leg was feeling hot and powerful, like it could do more than a human leg could. Sure enough, he let out this amazing kick with his artificial leg that sent James and Cassie flying against the wall.

They just sat there for a second, staring up him, dazed and surprised. They had been laughing so hysterically. Now their laughter ceased. In its place came tears.

In fact, all three kids were crying now.

And it took all of Big Red's willpower not to throw Billy against the wall and break him like a toy.

Instead, he forced himself to drop the crying baby back in his crib. Then he headed out the door and down the stairs. He had to turn his big feet all the way outward like a penguin to fit them onto the narrow steps.

The chain saw continued its high-pitched scream as Red clomped down, down, down to the basement.

He was getting angrier with every step.

Boone's Grave

Kelly got out of the car first. She stood staring at the old weather-beaten gray cabins.

She could hear the others getting out of the car behind her, hear the car doors closing. She could feel her friends coming up alongside her. No one said a word.

The sun was down, but total darkness hadn't set in yet. The horseshoe of weather-beaten cabins hulked in the strange half-light; it was as if the buildings had the group surrounded. Kelly bowed her head.

"This is the place?" Doug asked her.

Kelly didn't know how she knew the place better—from the photos in her notebook or from her nightmares. But this was—oh, yes—this was the place. She nodded slightly, put a hand over her mouth. She wanted to scream.

All the times she'd been out to Boone's grave in Newkirk, she'd always felt that the place wasn't right. She hated the dainty flowers people sometimes left on his tombstone. She always brushed them off. She knew Boone wouldn't want them. This—this eerie old camp—this was Boone's real grave.

"Hey, Jason!" Miguel yelled. He laughed. "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" The short muscular boy picked up a stick and strode around happily, banging doors and wooden porch railings. "Looks deserted," he reported.

"Duh," Tina said.

"Just us chickens," Doug said, winking at Tina. "Alone in the dark."

Kelly pressed both hands hard against her temples. She kept standing there while the others were laughing and joking. They were stretching, unwinding, exploring. A wave of dizziness passed over her. Why had she come back here? For a moment, she couldn't remember.

It was Boone who reminded her. He was sitting—she now saw—on the porch of Cabin One, dangling his leather boots off the side. "You came up here to kill Jason," he told her with a familiar laugh. "Course, a lot of good that'll do me now." He cackled. "Just kidding." He flashed a jagged smile. "I'm glad you came."

He stood, wiped his hands on the thighs of his ragged jeans, then turned and disappeared into the darkness of the cabin door, raising his hand in a wave of good-bye.

Kelly's chest was heaving; she wanted to scream his name, make him come back. She started running toward the cabin.

"Kelly?" Doug called after her.

"What the—" Tina began.

The cabin was dark and smelled of mildew and wet wood. There were a few metal bunk beds—naked springs, no mattresses. The cabin was empty. Kelly stood in the darkness, breathing deeply. "Boone," she whispered.

She could feel his presence, as if at any moment he might come up behind her and tap her on the shoulder. He didn't, though, and after a moment she walked back out onto the porch.

The other three were all standing where she had left them, staring at her. "What gives?" Miguel called.

Kelly had rehearsed the steps she would take tonight so many times. So many nights, lying awake, she'd gone over her plan. Which was lucky. Even though she was in a daze, she knew exactly what she had to do. "Okay," she said. "We've got to set up, and we've got to move fast."

"Think fast, Sanderson," Miguel said. He lunged at Doug, got him in a headlock, and started wrestling him down to the grass. Doug was laughing and yelling, trying to convince Miguel to let go. Kelly felt like letting Miguel continue, but there wasn't time.

"*Hey!*" she yelled, "*Miguel, Doug!*" They stopped, staring at her, looking alarmed. "Guys," she went on, trying to keep her voice normal, "listen up. I'm serious. We've got to get to work. I mean, our whole lives are at stake, okay? In case you want some motivation."

Miguel let Doug go—he fell to the ground with a thud. Tina sat down, looking like a bored princess, on the hood of the car. But at

least they were listening. "We've got to dig the trap," Kelly said.

Miguel hurried through the darkness toward the porch. He was rubbing his stubby hands together in excitement. "Time to do some monster-hunting, huh?"

"You betcha." Kelly grinned nervously. "This way."

She jumped down off the porch and led Miguel over to the car. She popped the trunk of the Volvo and took out the two large shovels she had brought. She handed one to Miguel and held out the other to Doug, who was limping toward her.

"This guy's a maniac," he complained. "I think he tore my leg off. Somebody look at it, will ya? Just to see if it's still attached."

Kelly ignored him, handing him the shovel instead of answering. "Miguel, Doug—I need you guys to start digging."

"Digging?" Tina asked; she slid off the car hood and stood with hand on hip, looking annoyed.

"Yes, digging," Kelly said curtly. She handed out the flashlights. "Here, it's going to get incredibly dark very soon, and there isn't any electricity around here, so keep these with you no matter where you go."

Miguel jammed the handle of the flashlight in his back pocket. He hefted his shovel. "What are we digging?"

"The trap," Kelly said. "Tina, there are some candles in the glove compartment, and here—here's a bag of old clothes. I want you to light the candles and put them in the window of—" She surveyed the field. She pointed to the cabin in the exact center of the horseshoe. "That cabin. Then take the clothes down to the lake, wet them, and hang them over the railing of the cabin to dry."

Tina stared at her in the fading light. "Come again?"

"Just do what I tell you!" Kelly said. Trying to force some gentleness back into her voice, she added, "Please."

"She said the magic word," Doug told Tina, smiling lightly. He was resting two hands and his chin on the handle of his shovel.

Tina didn't move. "You mind telling us what this is all about?"

"Yeah," Miguel asked eagerly, "what's the plan?"

"Okay," Kelly said. "Here it is. We're going to make it look like we're staying in that cabin." She pointed at Cabin Five. "But we're not

going to be there, see. We're going to be watching from these cabins on the sides. Me and Doug over there, you and Tina on that side."

"Why do we have to split up?" Tina asked.

Kelly knew Tina wouldn't like these sleeping arrangements, but she didn't have time to argue with her. "Shut up, Tina, I'm serious." She said it casually, like it wasn't a big insult or anything; still, Tina shut up. "I want you guys to start digging right—"

She led the way over to Cabin Five, took a few last giant steps, stopped, pointed down. "Right here. This is where we'll set up the trap. The hole doesn't have to be all that wide, but it has to be long. I want to be sure that if Jason walks toward the cabin, he'll hit it."

She hooked her dirty-blond hair behind her ears on either side. "Listen, I figure Jason will come for us tonight. But if we're ready for him, I'm sure this is going to work."

The truth was she was feeling anything but sure. She clapped her hands. "Okay, let's get a move on!"

"Far out," Miguel said. Then he started digging furiously, his muscular biceps knotting and clenching. He grunted with the effort.

Kelly watched for a moment, feeling a surge of gratitude that this powerful guy had come along on the trip. Digging the hole was going to go fast with Miguel around.

Sighing, Tina plodded back to the car and took the bag of laundry out of the trunk. "Where's the lake?"

"Follow that trail," Kelly called to her. "You can't miss it. But if you run into trouble, start screaming. Even if you just start getting weird vibes, you know what I mean? Don't be afraid to holler."

"Gee, thanks," Tina said.

Kelly watched her disappear into the thick forest. Doug was digging alongside Miguel now—though he wasn't digging anywhere near as hard.

"I'm going to go get some branches to make into spikes," she told them. "Then I'll come back and help you with the shoveling."

"You got it, babe," Miguel called, sending another thick cloud of dirt sailing over his head.

Doug stopped shoveling, grinned, and waved. Kelly thought a moment. Then she went over to Doug. "Here," she said. "Maybe you

better hold on to this while I'm gone."

Doug stared down at the gun in horror. "Is it loaded?"

"What do you think?"

He took it gingerly.

Kelly got her long hunting knife out of the car. The moon was already out; full and silver, its haunted face stared down like the face of Jason's hockey mask in the few fuzzy photos in Kelly's notebook. Photos that skeptics claimed were fake. Kelly knew better.

There was enough light shining off the moon and filtering down through the trees to make the six-inch silver blade of Kelly's knife gleam. She gripped the handle hard. "Don't worry, Boone," she said out loud. "He's going to pay."

Then she started out of the clearing, making her way into the woods. "Hey, Kell," Miguel called just as she was leaving.

"What?"

"This is really it, isn't it?"

"Huh?"

"Monster-hunting! We're doing it."

"Yeah!" she called back, trying to sound enthusiastic.

Miguel was right. This was really it.

The wooden house was dark and quiet as Bud junior and his wife drove up the grassy drive.

"Looks like Dad got them to sleep all right," Bud junior told his wife with a proud smile. Earlier this evening, Buddy and his wife had argued whether it was safe to let his father mind the kids—even for a couple of hours. Looked like he'd been right to trust his dad, Buddy thought happily.

Jessie took Buddy's hand as they strolled up the steps to the front door. That wasn't like her. A night away from the kids seemed to have done her a world of good.

Jessie went in first. Buddy was putting the latch on the door when his wife gasped.

He whirled. Through the archway into the living room he could see the liquor cabinet; it had been smashed open and toppled onto the floor.

Husband and wife stared at each other for one shocked second, then Jessie started racing up the front stairway. Buddy just stood where he was. He was moving toward the fallen liquor cabinet, his feet crunching over broken glass, when the screams came from upstairs.

They were piercing horrible screams that sounded as if his wife were vomiting up her insides, they were so loud.

The Night Shift

"How deep does she want this thing, anyway?" Miguel asked. He had been digging dutifully for an hour. Now he was sweating heavily, but still he was keeping up a steady rhythm.

"Deep enough to bury us," Doug said snidely.

Tina was on the porch, draping the wet clothes over the railing. "That's no joke," she said. "I'm starting to get scared."

"That's 'cause you're a coward," Miguel said. "Like all girls."

"I'm not scared of monsters, you dweeb," Tina said. "I'm scared of Kelly. I mean, who knows what she's capable of!"

Miguel and Doug both peered up at her from down in the hole. The candles she had set up in the windows threw a tiny flickering light across her thin, pretty face, catching the worry in her dark eyes. In the distance an owl screeched. Or was it somebody's dying scream?

Tina shivered. "Seriously. I think she's so stressed out, she could be planning a mass suicide or something. You know, a sacrifice in honor of her beloved Boone. Maybe she's really having us dig our own grave."

"Maybe I am," Kelly said softly from the side of the porch.

Tina screamed. "Hey!" she snapped. "I told you in the car, stop trying to scare me."

Miguel chuckled happily. "She got you again!"

"I mean it," Tina said to Kelly, shaking her finger like a schoolteacher. "Don't you ever do that again!"

"Well don't accuse me of being a killer," Kelly said, "and then we'll talk."

The tall girl stepped out of the shadows. She was stooped over. She was carrying a whole bundle of thick branches, balancing them across the back of her neck. She tilted to the side, dumping the load of wood on the ground. Miguel climbed out of the hole to help her.

"These are the stakes?" he asked.

"Yeah." Kelly knelt down to inspect the hole. The two had dug down deep. So deep that Doug, who was in the hole, and Kelly, who was kneeling outside it, were face to face. "This is great," Kelly said, her gray-blue eyes gleaming in the darkness. "This is great."

"Glad you like it," Doug said. "I think my back is broken."

Kelly smiled. "Yeah? Well, it's going to be worth it. Because it's going to slice Jason to pieces. Come on, give me a hand."

"Oh, goody, more work," Doug said, but he took the long branches from her as she handed them down.

Kelly found a boulder, which Miguel used to hammer the stakes into the hole. Then she gave Doug her knife. Miguel had a pocketknife. She told them both to whittle the tops of the stakes into sharp points. She really wanted to do that task herself. She'd dreamed of it every time she'd whittled a piece of wood this year—dreamed of knowing that with each cut of the knife she was carving out Jason's death.

But there wasn't time. Instead she took Tina back into the woods to gather some long thin saplings. These they used to weave a latticework cover over the trap. On top they tossed leaves and then dirt.

When they were done, the four all stood around the trap admiring their handiwork.

"It's really pretty good," Tina said, sounding surprisingly proud. "I mean, you'd never know it was there."

"Especially in the dark," Doug agreed. "My luck, I'll have to take a whiz in the middle of the night and *I'll* forget, and then I'll be the one who falls into this thing."

"Or maybe I'll push you in," Miguel said, shoving Doug toward the hole.

Doug spun out of his grasp. "Miguel," he said, "you're cruisin' for a bruise, you know that?"

"Oh, right," Miguel said, laughing. "And what are you going to do to me, huh, big man?" Miguel waved his hands in the air, karate-style, but Doug just moved away.

"Guys, we're not done yet," Kelly said.

The group froze, staring at her in disbelief. Kelly waved at the huge piles of dirt they had dug out. "This dirt is a dead giveaway. We've got to move it in back of the cabin."

Doug pretended to faint. Tina groaned. But within minutes, they were back at work, carrying shovelfuls of dirt around behind the cabin. It took another hour. By then, they were all exhausted and grimy and sweaty.

"Now what?" Miguel asked Kelly.

"Let me guess," Tina said. "We run a hundred miles around the lake really fast."

Kelly clenched her hands, feeling the sweat on her palms. "Nope," she said grimly. "Now we wait."

Kelly insisted on taking the first shift. So did Miguel. The four all set up their sleeping bags in cabins on opposite sides of the trap. Then they met in the middle of the clearing for one last pep talk from Kelly. As her friends gathered close around her, she flashed on a memory of Boone.

All the little kids in the neighborhood used to worship her older brother. Boone could make anything fun. And wherever he was, it always seemed like the center of the universe. Sometimes he'd organize these massive touch football games. He was always the quarterback, and the little kids' favorite part was the huddle. They'd cluster around Boone, all trying to get as close to him as possible, and he'd give each kid a silly assignment that would make them laugh. "You, Herbie, you go long, jump up and down, and stick your finger up your nose!"

It was the looks on her friends' faces, eyeing her in the darkness, that brought this memory back to Kelly. As much as the group had poohpoohed this whole trip, she could tell they were all beginning to take it more seriously now, now that darkness was here. They wanted to be told what to do.

"We'll do three-hour shifts," she said quietly. "That way, there's always going to be two people awake. So if someone falls asleep, the

other person can wake them up. When Jason comes, try not to make a sound, until he's in the trap. Then shout your head off. But guys, the most important thing of all is, we gotta have somebody awake at all times. That trap is deadly. If we're not totally careful, some innocent person could fall into it, we gotta keep that in mind."

They all clasped hands in the darkness, a group handshake. Then they took their positions.

An hour later, the candles in the window of Cabin Five were still flickering. They gave the cabin the look of a huge creepy jack-o'-lantern, with the windows for eyes and the dark open doorway for a mouth. All the time, the sound of the transistor radio Kelly had set up in the cabin kept playing its tinny music; she kept catching snatches of songs—

"... love you to death... till the day we die... you're tearing me apart..."

It was true what they said. The songs on the radio always seemed to be about whatever it was that was happening to you.

Gun in hand, Kelly was sitting with her back against the cabin wall, her face a few feet back from the open window. Occasionally, she caught glimpses of Miguel, moving around behind his window post. She had given him her knife.

Tina had insisted on sleeping in the cabin next to his, not in the same one, despite Miguel's pleading. And Tina's refusal had pissed Miguel off royally. Not that Tina ever slept in the same room with him back at the house, but apparently he felt things should be different out here in the woods.

Miguel had often bragged to Doug about how great Tina had been in the sack, and other typical macho-man stuff. But Tina told Kelly that she and Miguel had made out and that was it. As much as she liked Miguel, Kelly had to believe Tina.

A twig snapped.

Kelly sat up straight, her entire body instantly rigid and alert.

But she didn't hear another sound, and eventually her body relaxed again.

She turned to look at Doug, who had set up their two sleeping bags right in the middle of the floor and was using a bunch of rolled-up

shirts as a pillow. It was a hot night. Doug had stripped down to his Jockey shorts and was sleeping on top of his sleeping bag. He had left his shoes and socks on. He was also snoring, something Doug always insisted he never did.

Doug was like that. As good-looking as he was, he was still very vain and sensitive about certain things. Kelly felt another wave of gratitude that he was here. Looking at his lanky body, so graceful even in sleep, she forgave him completely for flirting with that waitress. After all, she hadn't been the easiest girlfriend to get along with this year.

For instance, Doug had not exactly gone to bed happy tonight. He had made another pass at her and they had replayed their scene from earlier in the alley, with Doug getting even more frustrated and angry this time.

"Unbelievable, right, Boone?" she now asked softly, her lips barely moving. "Like I'm going to be making out when Jason comes." She chuckled quietly. "That'd be one way to make him mad, now wouldn't it? Since that's why he drowned in the first place. Funny, huh?"

Was it the wind? Or did the trees in the surrounding woods seem to shake their leaves in a whispery "Yessss"?

Kelly glanced down at her watch, holding the face up close to her eyes. Almost three. She should probably wake up Doug soon. Her eyelids felt so heavy.

Kelly and Boone on the lake in a rowboat—so peaceful... suddenly, Jason rose up out of the water, screaming, knife held high

Kelly awoke with a start, her eyes wide. She had fallen asleep, just like that. She was so tired that falling asleep was the easiest thing in the world. All she had to do was let go and it was as if she were plummeting down into this dark pit. It was horrible the way her nightmares were waiting for her down there.

Propping her eyes open with her fingers, she watched the woods for a few minutes more. Then:

"Miguel!" She leaned forward and hissed out the window. He stuck his head out as well. There was enough moonlight for Kelly to see

that he had put on a headband and smeared his cheeks with mudlike war paint. What a crazy man—but just the kind of crazy man she wanted to have around right now. "You seen anything?"

"No, you?"

She shook her head. "Listen, I think we should wake up Doug and Tina for the next shift. I'm fading fast. What do you say?"

"You're the boss."

"Okay, wake her up."

Miguel grinned and waved, then disappeared into the shadows again. A moment later, he emerged from the darkness of the doorway and headed for the next cabin.

Kelly stood with a groan, her joints all cold and stiff from sitting on the damp wooden floor for so many hours. She knelt beside Doug. She reached down to wiggle his left sneaker.

His foot came off in her hand.

Alone at Last

She fell on Doug, shaking him roughly. "Whaa—?" he cried. "Hey—get that sneaker out of my face!"

It was only then that Kelly saw what she was holding. Doug had taken off his sneakers, kicking them off at the foot of the makeshift bed. He had left the socks in the shoes.

Kelly collapsed face-first onto the sleeping bag next to Doug. "Oh, God," she groaned. The groan was partly out of relief that Doug was okay, and partly because the floor under the sleeping bag was very hard.

"You're not wired, now, are you?" Doug asked. He rolled over and put his arm around her, kissed her ear. "Did you catch lots of monsters while I was sleeping?"

"Doug," she said. "Stop it."

"Stop what?"

"*That*," she said, pushing his hand away. "C'mon," she said, "I'm going to be asleep any second, you've got to do your guard duty. I left the gun on the windowsill."

"Right," he said with a sigh. "After all, those trees out there wouldn't know how to stand up straight unless we watched them all night."

"Please," she mumbled. She heard him grumbling, felt him getting to his feet.

It was the last thing she remembered.

As Doug took his place at the window, Kelly started snoring. He turned and smiled at her. Here she was always claiming he was the noisy one, and whenever she slept she was always buzzing away like a chain saw. He never told her, though. The poor girl had enough on her mind.

Outside in the clearing, Miguel was coming out of Tina's cabin. He waved to Doug, who waved back. Miguel rubbed his eyes, miming how sleepy he was. Then he disappeared inside his cabin. A moment later, Tina appeared in the window of her cabin. She waved to Doug as well.

Doug blew a kiss. She blew one back. So Doug blew two kisses. Then he started beaming his flashlight into her window.

C'mon, he told himself, don't get yourself into trouble. He kept telling himself that for almost fifteen minutes. All the time he could see Tina—her long black hair, her thin pretty face—framed in the cabin window like a picture. Doug sighed. He knew when he was licked. Leaving the gun and flashlight on the windowsill, he quietly tiptoed out of the cabin. He signaled to Tina. She met him in the middle of the clearing.

He watched her come, thinking that the girl had the most amazing figure. A dark exotic beauty, no doubt about it.

"What's up?" she asked, trying to look bored but looking excited nevertheless.

"Can you believe how stupid this is?" he whispered.

She shook her head no, which meant that her waist-long hair swished from side to side like a tail.

"I don't think I can stay up all night," he told her.

"Me neither."

They were eyeing each other in the darkness. She was smiling. Is she thinking the same thing I'm thinking? Doug wondered.

"Want to go for a walk?" he asked casually. "Somewhere we can, you know, talk?"

By way of an answer, her smile broadened. Damn! She was thinking exactly the same thing he was thinking.

There were a number of trails leading off from the main circle of cabins. Doug chose one almost at random. The woods were thick. There were brambles and vines that kept pushing into their faces. Doug kept reaching out his hand to help Tina across the fallen piles of branches, even when the piles were slight and she didn't need a hand. In fact, he took every possible opportunity to put his hands on her, hoisting her over boulders, guiding her around trees.

And then one time—after helping her across a tiny stream—he didn't let go of her hand. She didn't pull her hand away either.

Doug's heart was beating like crazy. It wasn't like he had never been unfaithful to Kelly. Almost every time she went off into the woods, he got back together with his ex-girlfriend, Lisa, just to name one example.

But with Kelly sleeping only a couple of hundred yards away? That would be a new trick.

Well, it was her own fault. The way she'd been pushing him away lately. He was only human, after all. And Tina was just so incredibly hot.

He only lasted a few yards holding Tina's hand. Suddenly, he pulled her up against the wide trunk of a tall tree. He could barely make out her face until his own face was inches from hers; her dark eyes were so serious, and yet welcoming. He kissed her hard. He went on kissing her—until he had to pull away gasping for air.

"Oh, man," he said. "This is wrong."

Her answer took away the little breath he had left. "Why?" she asked calmly.

"*Why?*" He had to laugh. "Because of Kelly," he said. But when she pulled him back to her, he didn't resist. She was kissing his neck, his ear.

"Don't tell me you're really serious about her," she murmured in between kisses.

He pulled back. "I am," he said. He felt like he had to say it, even though his heart wasn't in it.

She just laughed.

"Look," he said. "I've never cheated on her before."

Tina was guffawing.

"Well, anyway, I've never messed around while she's around, okay?"

"She's not around," Tina said, and then she yanked him roughly back to the tree. She was so passionate, like some kind of animal. She was chewing on his bottom lip.

"Wow," he said, "you're really wild, you know that?"

"Only with you." She slid her hands up under his T-shirt. He felt her long nails rake across his back, and he made a mental note to keep his shirt on tomorrow around Kelly.

"Really?" he said. He was amused, and a little curious. "You're not... like this... with Miguel?"

"Are you kidding? All I ever do with him is run away. I can't get rid of him."

"Ah." He couldn't fight it any longer. Doug put one hand over his head, resting it on the trunk of the tree as he relaxed into the next kiss.

Then he realized what his hand was holding. He pulled back again.

"What's wrong?" Tina asked.

"Nothing," Doug said. He looked up—and up. "In fact, I think we're in business."

Tina looked up as well. Just over her head, Doug was holding on to a wooden rung that had been nailed into the tree trunk. Above that rung was another, and another, leading up into the bushy leaves of the tree. Just visible, high above them, was the plywood floor of a big tree house.

"Want to come upstairs?" Doug asked suavely.

Tina giggled. "Maybe. You got something to drink up there?"

"Sure. There's my dad's bar. Plus cable, HBO. And, hey, I almost forgot. I picked up the new Spin Doctors CD, I want you to listen to it."

"I hate the Spin Doctors."

"Oh. Well I'm sure there's something up there you'll like." He knitted his hands together to give her a boost. "After you," he said.

He hoisted her up, enjoying the view as her lithe body clambered up the tree, going right past his nose. He climbed up after her, reaching up now and then to swipe playfully at her fanny.

The tree house was vast, damp, and utterly dark. There seemed to be some empty liquor bottles scattered around, and plenty of cobwebs. Doug was sure Tina would complain about the clammy odor. But instead, as soon as they had both climbed all the way up, she wrapped her thin arms around his neck and drew him down on top of her. "I love the way you fixed up your house," she murmured.

"Wait till I show you the jacuzzi."

All around them was the smell of fresh pine and wood and sap. The tree was swaying slightly, the leaves rustling gently in the breeze, as if trying to fan the young lovers. Their kisses grew hot and heavy.

"Oh, God," Tina said. "I hate to say this, but you make Miguel seem like a child."

"Oh, yeah? He's not... a good kisser?"

"Are you kidding?" Tina snickered. "I'm sorry, but he is the *worst*. He doesn't kiss, he slobbers. And he always has bad breath, like sour-cream-and-onion potato chips that have gone all rancid."

"Ugh."

"Tell me about it, it's so—Say, did you just hear something?"

Doug propped himself up on an elbow and listened. "Nah." He smiled down at her archly. "Now where was I?"

"Here," said Tina. She giggled. "And here, and here."

"Mmmm..."

Suddenly, Tina pushed away from him. "I heard it again," she said.

"Heard what?"

"I don't know, like footsteps. Like someone's climbing up the tree."

"Tina."

"What?"

"Don't tell me you're going to get all paranoid on me, like Kelly is."

"I'm not getting paranoid, I'm sure I—"

"Tina, let me put it to you this way. Our time alone tonight is precious. Pretty soon we've got to go back to camp, in case one of those two nutcases wakes up and finds us missing. Now do you really want to waste some of our precious seconds on me going down to check if there's someone climbing up the tree house?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Good." He silenced all further objections with his next kiss.

At least, he silenced her until *he* heard the footsteps. "Jesus," he whispered.

He moved fast now, crawling toward the open hole around the tree's wide trunk. He moved even faster after he looked down the hole. It was dark, but not dark enough that he couldn't see the bald head of the huge man climbing toward him.

Don't Breathe a Word

Whimpering softly, Big Red climbed all the way up into the tree house.

Pa and Tuck and Bud had built this tree house years ago. They told Ma they were building it for Big Red. Instead, they used it for afternoon naps when they were really drunk. And they told Big Red he couldn't use it at all. Well, there was no way they would find out now.

Big Red thought he heard something scurrying back into the shadows as he came up into the house. Probably squirrels or something.

He sat there, hands over his mask, blubbering like a two-year-old. He just felt so awful for what he had done, to Ma and Pa, Tuck and Bud... But most of all, he felt bad about those little kids. Those children were his friends.

"I'm sorry," he kept saying. "I'm sorry."

He didn't know how it had happened. After he killed Bud, he was still in a rage. He went upstairs. And the next thing he knew, it was like his artificial leg took on a life of its own. It started kicking and stomping and—

Big Red stuck the liquor bottle he was holding up to the hole in his mask and tilted his head back. He had taken three bottles from Buddy's house. This one was all that was left.

At first Red wanted to smash all the bottles in Buddy's house, spill out all the liquor that had caused so much pain and trouble through the years. But then he thought it might make him feel better if he drank some.

It hadn't worked. He kept seeing these awful pictures from Buddy's house. Like that new dollhouse Uncle Bud was working on down in his son's workshop. After Big Red had gotten so angry, he'd used the chain saw on Uncle Bud. Then he'd wedged Bud's head into the

dollhouse. It looked so creepy, sitting there. Uncle Bud's eyes kept staring right out the dollhouse windows.

Big Red belched loudly. He had already drunk enough liquor to kill a smaller man, but Big Red was huge. Still, the tree house seemed to be spinning wildly all around him, and his stomach felt like it was spinning wildly in the opposite direction.

He sucked the last liquor from the bottle, then dropped it to the floor with a loud clunk. He felt like he was going to throw up. He lowered his head to the floor, mouth open, ready to chuck his cookies.

Instead, he fell forward, his face smacking hard against the floor.

The hard white mask protected him against the fall. Big Red was out cold.

Doug tugged on Tina's hand. Her hand was like ice. He had to tug several times before she started inching forward out of the shadows toward the wooden rung ladder in the center of the tree house.

They didn't dare so much as whisper to each other until they were thirty or forty yards away from the tree.

"Doug," Tina said, her eyes wide, "who was that?"

"Some drunk."

"God, I was terrified. Listen, you don't think that guy could have anything to do with what Kelly—"

Doug was ready for this. He held up a hand like a traffic cop. "No way."

"Well, at least we should tell her, I mean, God—"

Doug grabbed her by the shoulders. "Listen to me, Tina, it was just some old wino, okay? It has nothing to do with us. And if we breathe a word to Kelly, we're going to have to explain what *we* were doing up there. Think about that, would you?"

"You're hurting me."

"Sorry. Come on." He started back through the woods toward camp, pulling her along behind him. He didn't tell her that he

thought he caught a glimpse of the huge guy's face, and that he seemed to be wearing a white mask.

For God's sake, thought Doug, why bring that up?

Anyway, he assured himself, it was so dark in there. Must have been his imagination.

The Apache Scout Nest

"Whatcha doing? Digging another trap?"

Kelly squinted up into the sunlight. Miguel was standing at the edge of the shallow hole she was digging. He was wearing a hunter-style blue plaid vest over his bare chest, gym shorts, and sneakers. His powerful arms were crossed.

Kelly returned to digging. "Nope," she said. "This is an Apache scout nest."

A happy smile appeared on Miguel's bulldog face. He knew he was going to like this. "Whazzat?"

"Well"—Kelly sent a spadeful of black dirt flying past Miguel's sneakers—"I can only tell you what Boone told me."

"It's probably bull, then," Miguel said amiably. Kelly froze. It was true, about Boone. He loved to make things up. But it made her blood boil when anyone said anything bad about him. She just stood there glaring until Miguel prompted her, "What did he say?"

"Boone says—said—that back when the cowboys were fighting the Indians, they used to chase these Indians through the woods and then"—Kelly snapped her fingers—"just like that the Indians would disappear."

"Yeah?" Miguel grinned and twisted his wispy mustache. He was obviously hooked. "Cool, heh-heh-heh. How'd they do that?"

"Well, the cowboys never figured it out. But this was how. Those branches over there, that's going to be the cover for the nest. The scout would throw himself down into this hole and pull the top down over him like a hatch door. The cowboys could be standing right on top of the Indian and not know he was there."

Miguel whistled. And for a second, she thought about telling him the really big news. If he thought an Apache scout nest was cool, how would he react to the news that Boone had come by this morning to

watch her dig? Boone had told her that Jason wouldn't come for them till nightfall.

No, thought Kelly. This piece of information she'd better keep to herself.

"Way cool," Miguel said, bending down to study the nest. He grinned. "Good morning, by the way."

"Morning." She grinned up at him. She really was fond of old Miguel. "You sleep okay?"

Miguel frowned. "Yeah, sure."

Kelly didn't press him for more details. He was probably upset about the *way* he had slept—namely, *alone*. "Here," she said. "Try it out."

She got out of the nest and waited until Miguel lay down inside. Then she pulled the trapdoor of branches and leaves down on top of him. Just like that, he disappeared totally into the leafy floor of the forest.

She pulled open the hatch. "Perfect," she said.

"Okay," Miguel said. "Let me see how fast I can do it." He paced back into the woods, got a running start, then threw himself down into the hole and pulled the hatch down.

Then the hatch opened. Miguel sat up grinning proudly, like a corpse happy to be getting out of his coffin. "How was that?"

"Perfect." Kelly reached down and they high-fived.

"Listen," she told him, her tone turning serious. "If you get into trouble tonight, anytime, don't forget this is here, okay? If Jason follows you, try to lead him past this spot. If you get enough of a lead, it could save your life."

"Right." Miguel sneered. He stood up and started angrily dusting himself off.

"What's the matter?" Kelly asked.

"Nothing."

"*Miguel... What?*"

"Nothing, Kelly. It's just... you had me really geared up for last night, you know? I was up almost the whole night." This was an exaggeration. Miguel had fallen asleep one minute after Kelly. "And for what?"

"Don't worry," Kelly said. "He'll be here."

"Yeah? When?"

As if on cue-

There were loud piercing cries from the campsite.

Picnic

"Kelly! Miguel! Doug!" It was Tina, yelling at the top of her lungs. Miguel and Kelly stared at each other for a moment. Then they started to run.

When they came through the trees into the clearing, they saw her. Tina was carefully spreading a white sheet out on the ground. She stood up when she saw them coming. She put a fist against her hip. "There you are," she said. "I've been looking all over for you. Where did everybody go? And where's Doug?"

Kelly stopped running. She stood, one hand across her chest, trying to catch her breath. "He's not—?" She pointed at her cabin.

Tina looked surprised. "Oh, you guys stayed in *that* cabin? I was looking in Cabin Seven."

Miguel strode forward. "Listen, what's the idea shouting like that? You really scared—"

He stopped himself too late. The word was out.

"I scared you?" Tina asked, laughing delightedly. "Kelly, did you hear what I heard? I scared macho-man."

"Oh, cut the crap," Miguel said sourly. "What did you want us for, anyway?"

"Breakfast," Tina said. She gestured at the bags of potato chips, boxes of cereal, and other food she had bought at the supermarket on the trip up. "I've decided to share," she said proudly. "But if you keep acting so huffy I'll change my mind."

Miguel plopped down on one corner of the sheet. "Great," he said. "Feed me, woman."

"Miguel," Tina said, "I told you, I don't like that joke."

"Doug?" Kelly called as she headed for their cabin. She found him facedown on his sleeping bag, legs splayed. "Doug?"

"Please don't wake me up," he said into his pillow of a shirt.

"We're having breakfast."

"I'll pass."

"I need to talk to *everyone*," Kelly insisted.

Doug grunted. "I'll be there in a few hours."

She laughed, but said, "Now," and she said it firmly enough that she was sure she had gotten her point across. Sure enough, Doug showed up a few minutes later.

Big Red showed up two minutes after that.

Not that anyone saw him. He stood in the dark shade of the woods, watching the group's little picnic. His large head was throbbing. He felt like his brain was glued to the roof of his skull. He was also hungry. And the kids looked like such nice boys and girls. Maybe they would share....

Out in the clearing, everyone was sitting on the sheet, passing around the box of fat-free granola, scooping out handfuls with their bare hands. Kelly said, "Okay, here's what we've got to do today. We've got to spread more bait."

They all stared at her blankly.

"I brought two tape recorders," Kelly went on. "I figure I'll take one and work around the east side of the lake." She pulled her map of Crystal Lake out of her jacket pocket and smoothed it out against her thigh. She pointed. "I'll try to cover this area here. Miguel, you and Tina take the other tape recorder and go west. There are still some vacation houses and other people living down there."

"What's all this about?" Tina asked morosely.

"We're going to knock on doors," Kelly explained, "pretend we're reporters or something. You know, like we're collecting information on Jason and the whole legend thing. But everyone we talk to, we make sure we drop the news that we're staying here."

"What about me?" Doug asked sleepily.

"You stay here."

"I love this plan," Doug said.

"Yeah, but no sleeping. You guys really let me down last night. We need someone watching the trap at all times."

They all stared at her blankly. No one looked too excited about her plan, that was for sure.

Big Red was excited. He couldn't hear what the boys and girls were saying, but he wanted to join them, play with them, eat with them....

"Uh, Kelly," Tina began. "I really think I ought to be getting back home."

"Why?" Miguel demanded. "You don't have anything to do back there."

"So? I don't have anything to do here either."

Miguel and Tina were staring at each other so crossly that Kelly felt like at any moment they might come to blows. "Hold it," she said. "Tina, if you want to go, that's fine with me. Same goes for you, Miguel, and you, Douggie. I mean it."

"Thanks a lot," Doug said. His eyes were closed. He was sitting cross-legged, leaning back on his hands, his handsome face tilted up to catch the rays.

"If you go," Miguel said to Tina, "how are *we* going to get home?"

"I don't know," Tina said with a shrug. "Bus? Train?" She waved her hands in exasperation. "I'm sorry, guys, I don't want to be a party pooper. But let's face it. This is so boring."

As Tina went on complaining, Kelly studied her face. She was surprised by what she was thinking. She was thinking that Tina was lying.

Big Red was also staring hard at Tina. She was a pretty girl with black hair that went all the way down her back. But she was making these faces. Nasty faces. It reminded Big Red of something.

At first he couldn't think what. Then he had it. He saw himself walking past a group of teenagers hanging out in front of Denny's Diner. He hadn't been able to hear what they were saying that time either. But he saw one girl making those same nasty faces and pointing at him. Then all the teenagers laughed. They laughed right at Big Red.

Doug burst out laughing. "Sorry," he said. "But you know what you sound like, Tina? You sound like you're blaming Kelly 'cause we didn't get any monster action last night."

"That's ridiculous," Tina said, but Doug kept chuckling.

He's laughing at *me*, thought Big Red.

Suddenly, Tina gasped and dropped the cereal box.

A green grasshopper had hopped right onto her hand. Now it was Kelly who laughed. She flicked her hand out as expertly as a frog

whipping out its tongue; she caught the grasshopper in her fist. She raised the fist to her mouth and bit off the grasshopper's head.

There were loud, horrified groans from the rest of the group. "Yummy," Kelly said, chewing.

"You really are insane," Tina said, her eyes wide.

Kelly laughed again as she finished the rest of the insect. These guys were so easy to gross out. "All bugs are good food, pretty much," she said, chewing. She licked her lips. "Ahhh."

Tina stood up quickly. "I think I'm going to throw up."

Kelly laughed harder. "Seriously, you guys should check it out. Ants are the only bugs that taste bitter, because they've got a lot of formic acid in them. And all bugs are very nutritious. Probably better for you than that granola crap. Boone and I once spent a week eating nothing but grubworms."

Everyone was making puking sounds now. Kelly laughed harder. In the woods, Big Red began to tremble. Now this blonde girl was laughing at him.

So many times he had been made fun of by teenagers. Teenagers just like these. The bad memories were washing over him.... The time those teenagers had pelted him with rocks. The time they had pushed him into the lake. The time... the time...

Big Red couldn't help it. He was getting angry again. These kids—these lousy brats—they would have to pay.

In the end, Tina agreed to spend just one more day at Crystal Lake and to follow Kelly's instructions, no matter how stupid she thought they were. After breakfast, Tina and Miguel went off one way, Kelly went off the other. Kelly tried to give Miguel the knife, but he insisted he didn't need any weapons, that his hands were registered as a deadly force. So Kelly took the knife. She left Doug with the gun.

As soon as they left, Doug stretched out and went to sleep.

He didn't wake up for three hours. He didn't wake up until the large dark shadow fell across his face.

He opened his eyes, squinting upward.

Then he sat up very, very quickly.

Darlene Falls for Doug

"Darlene," Doug said with a surprised and happy grin.

By way of a hello, the waitress cracked a wad of gum. She wasn't wearing her waitress uniform; she was wearing jeans and a red sweater, both very tight, and looking even sexier than she had the evening before. "Taking it easy, huh?" she asked him.

"That's right." He grinned toothily. "What brings you out here?"

She glanced off into the woods, as if she weren't really interested in their conversation at all, as if she had driven all the way out here into the woods for no particular reason. She didn't succeed in looking casual, though; actually, she looked a little nervous. "Well, I've got the afternoon off," she said. "Thought I'd come see how you all were doing."

"They left me, Darlene," Doug said, still lying down, still grinning widely. "My friends left me here, *all alone*."

"I'm sorry to hear that." But she flashed him a brief and radiant smile.

"Oh, me too," Doug agreed.

It was still a magical thing to him, even after so many successful encounters with women, the ease with which he could bring off these little transactions. There was always a point, early on, when he realized it was all going to go his way. When he realized that the woman *wanted* him, him—Doug Sanderson. This realization had never lost its thrill. And he was feeling that thrill right now.

Except it wasn't a pure thrill, because there was also Kelly to think about. And Tina. Now he'd be sort of cheating on them both.

He sat up, rocked back and forth, then jumped to his feet athletically. Standing, he was taller than Darlene. He gazed down at her.

"Hi," she said, lowering her eyes.

"Hi," he said, eyes steady, boring into hers.

"So what are you doing right now?" Darlene asked.

"Right now?" Doug scratched his sleek and handsome head in an imitation of thought. "Well, the thing is, I'm still awful tired."

She eyed him thoughtfully. "'S that right?"

"It is, Darlene. I don't know what it is. But I'm just exhausted."

Don't do this! he ordered himself. But it was such an old habit with him, like falling off a log. "You know what I was thinking of doing? I was thinking maybe I'd go in that cabin there and finish off my nap."

Darlene smiled mischievously. "Uh huh. And what am I supposed to do while you're sleeping?"

"Well, that's just the thing. See, I can't fall asleep unless someone sings me a lullaby."

It was a bold move, and for one dizzying moment Doug thought maybe this time he had gone too far. But then Darlene laughed so loudly she had to cover her mouth. "You crack me up," she said.

"I'm glad to hear it, Darlene. I really am. So, will you do that for me? Sing me a lullaby?"

"I can't sing."

"Oh, I bet you can. Now, I'm just going to walk around a second, make sure the coast is clear, as it were. You can go make yourself at home in that cabin there. I won't be a minute."

"That one right in the middle?"

"Yup, the one with the clothes hanging off the porch and the burnt-out candles in the windows."

Darlene started walking forward. She was halfway to the cabin when she turned to look back at him. "Don't be long," she told him.

"Oh, I won't."

Then she turned back, heading straight for the cabin's front door.

Doug started off down the trail.

Leaving Darlene to fall to her death in—

Trapped

The trap! Doug froze. He whirled. "*Darlene!*" he shouted.

The waitress stopped as if paralyzed. He raced toward her. "*Don't Move!*" he yelled.

She didn't move.

He grabbed her shoulders, pulling her back toward him. "What?" she asked, terrified. "What is it?!"

Doug was laughing. "Oh, man, that was close. You see—there's a trap here. See it? No, you can't see it, that's the amazing thing. But Darlene, you almost bought the farm. Here, you've got to go all the way around it, like this. That's right. Sorry about that! Didn't mean to scare you, ha-ha! Now don't go away! I'll be right back."

He jumped off the porch, made a wide circle around the trap, and started off down toward the lake.

Wow, that was close! Doug hurried down the trail to the lake. He felt so excited he thought he was going to faint. And at the same time, he felt awful about what he was doing. But he couldn't help himself. He was so horny. It was as if he had fallen into a trap of his own. There was no going back.

Doug went all the way down to the lake. He wanted to make extra sure he and Darlene were alone. He called out to Kelly, then Miguel, then Tina. He was satisfied with the silence he heard in response. They were probably miles away.

Doug kept grinning all the way back to the cabin. He had his hands in the pockets of his khaki shorts. For no reason he could think of, he started singing, "Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah. Someone's in the kitchen, I knowwww...."

Darlene was waiting for him, a bare leg dangling from the upper bunk.

Doug felt a surge of excitement.

Until he noticed...

The waitress's other bare leg.

The other leg was sticking out of the *lower* bunk.

For a split second, Doug was too stunned to move. He slowly turned his head from left to right, panning the cabin. Which meant he saw the rest of Darlene. The pieces were spread out over the metal bunk beds. An arm here, a head there.

But it wasn't until Doug turned his head all the way to the right that he saw—

The huge man in the blue overalls and the hockey mask.

Big Red was holding a bloody ax high over his masked head.

He charged.

Doug stepped back through the open doorway—

And fell hard onto his rump on the porch.

Big Red was on him in a flash, swinging the ax down. Doug scuttled backward, doing a crabwalk across the porch, keeping his toes just inches beyond the heavy blows of the ax.

Suddenly, Big Red's artificial leg snapped up into the air. The blue Lucite foot was right over Doug's head. It was about to crush him.

And Doug had reached the edge of the porch. No place left to go. Except—

Doug did a sort of backflip, flinging himself off the porch as hard as he could. He was planning—to the extent that he could think at all—to hit the ground, scramble up, and start running.

But he had forgotten about the trap.

Screaming, he crashed right through the flimsy cover of thin branches and leaves.

Big Red stared down in surprise as Doug dropped down onto the sharp stakes below.

Breaking Up

Big Red stood at the edge of the trap, trying to decide whether or not he should chop up Doug's dead body.

The voice in his head told him the answer. Just as it had told him to go back to Ma and Pa's shack this morning and get Pa's ax. There were still three others for Big Red to deal with. When he had finished all his homework, then he could play.

"Gotcha!" Miguel cried. He stabbed the water with his stick, then pulled the stick back out. He had caught nothing, as usual.

"Brilliant," Tina said.

Like Kelly, Tina and Miguel had spent their Friday wandering through the woods, knocking on doors. Few people answered. And several of those who did answer, answered the door with shotguns in their hands. By sundown, Tina was tired and starving and mad at herself for going along with Kelly's crazy plan once more.

And when they had finally made it back to camp, there was no one there. So for the last hour, Tina and Miguel had been sitting at the edge of the lake. Miguel was trying to spear frogs with a stick so they could grill them over a campfire tonight. He had boasted that he could catch every frog in the lake in about ten minutes. So far he had only succeeded in falling in the water twice.

Tina was hunkered down beside her boyfriend, sitting on her heels. There was a tension inside her, a tension that had been building up all day. She knew what it was she had to say, but she was trying desperately to hold it in. This wasn't going to be pretty, she knew. This was going to be bloody awful.

"Miguel," she began.

"What?" he asked without turning around.

But she had run out of courage again. "I don't know," she said finally.

As she watched the surface of the lake, a mosquito buzzed too close to the water and got gobbled up by a little fish. It gave her courage, in a way. What she was going to do to Miguel was all part of the natural order of things. All around them, creatures were struggling for survival, feeding on each other, looking for prey.

C'mon, now, Tina told herself. Tell him.

Instead, she said, "A lot of good this tape recorder turned out to be." She idly pressed record, stop, record.... "What did we tape? A lot of people telling us to get lost."

"Now they know we're here, that's all that matters," Miguel said. "You heard what Kelly said."

"Yeah, I heard her."

She also heard a strange sound behind her in the thick, dark woods, like a large animal crunching through the underbrush. She turned and stared behind them for several seconds. She thought she caught a glimpse of something moving around back there, something about the size of a moose. She wasn't going to tell Miguel, though. He'd chase the thing with his little spear and probably get them both killed.

She watched the woods for a minute more. But there were no more sounds, no more movements. "I hate the woods," she said.

"Why?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she dropped a pebble into the water, watched the spreading circles. The water was deep here, and muddy. "Miguel," she said after a long silence. "When we get back to Newkirk, I'm breaking up with you."

Miguel's head jerked toward her, a shocked look on his face. He laughed nervously. "Cool, heh-heh-heh-heh."

Breaking up was like diving off a high board. At a certain point, you just had to close your eyes and leap. Now she was falling, and there was no way to avoid the big splash. "I'm serious," Tina said.

"Yeah, tell me another one."

"Fine. Don't believe me." She waited for Miguel to say something more. She couldn't believe he was just ignoring her. It made her so mad, she blurted out, "Listen, there's something I've got to tell you."

Last night... Doug and I did more than watch that stupid trap, okay?! I mean, are you satisfied now?!"

Miguel turned his head slowly toward her, his eyes dark, ferocious. "What are you saying?"

"You figure it out. Doug and I are going out now, get it? We're an item. You want me to draw you a picture?"

Miguel's face flushed dark and red, as if it had been splashed with blood. "I—I don't believe you," he stammered.

"Believe me."

"Doug goes out with Kelly."

"Duh. He's dumping Kelly as soon as we get home."

Miguel looked away from her. Then he doubled over as if he'd been punched in the stomach. He started stabbing the water furiously with his stick. He gave several short animal screams of pain.

"Listen," Tina said, more softly this time. She went over and put her hand on his big biceps, but he jerked his arm away. His shoulders shook. He was crying. "Hey," Tina said, feeling awful, "I'm sorry it happened this way, but—"

She didn't finish the sentence.

Because right then she saw Big Red's reflection in the water. He was raising his bloody ax right over her head.

Hide and Go Seek

Big Red swung, aiming for the girl's head. He missed. Because just before he swung, the girl leaped forward into the water. She started swimming frantically.

That left the boy. Big Red raised his ax again. The boy turned to face him. His cheeks were stained with tears. He was shaking all over. His mouth was open.

Good. Good to see these lousy brats scared for once, thought Big Red. Just the way they had scared him.

"Miguel! Do your judo!" It was the girl in the water, screaming to the boy. "Do your judo!"

Miguel was barely aware of her shouts, and it was only in the furthest recess of his terrified brain that he knew what she was talking about. In class, Miguel had each of his students charge at him with a club raised over their heads. One after another, Miguel flipped his assailants down onto the wrestling mat, then took away the club and held it to the student's throat.

Only this wasn't class, and Miguel was shaking so hard he could barely hear what Tina was saying. There was a warm trickle running down his pants leg, which he was only vaguely aware was his own urine. And Big Red had the ax raised high in the air.

Miguel turned and ran.

Tina swam hard all the way around the bend. When she turned the corner out into the wide waters of the lake, she saw a gray raft, floating in the distance like a mirage. She swam out to it, grabbed hold of the rusty metal ladder on the raft's side. Then she started screaming for help.

When she stopped screaming, the silence that confronted her was total, vast. All around her stretched gray unruffled water. The lake was edged by thick woods. She couldn't see any houses. Who could hear her scream? Only that maniac with the ax.

She became very quiet. She would just stay here, she decided, hanging on to the raft. She would stay in the water. Stay very still. If she saw that crazy man along the shore, she could just duck down under the water. He'd never see her.

The water was cool, gentle. It felt like it was tickling her, taking tiny nips from her skin. But her waterlogged clothes and sneakers were weighing her down. Pulling herself farther out of the water with one hand, she reached down with her free hand and started to untie her shoelaces.

Running... falling... back on his feet... branches smacking his chest and arms... vines cutting his face...

It was as if someone had attached a huge power cable to Miguel's body; the electricity of fear was flowing through him. So much fear that it was almost impossible for him to process what was happening to him.

The big man was after him, the man with the mask, the man with the ax. The big man was running, thundering through the woods right behind him. And sometimes the big man's footsteps sounded like metal the way they banged down on the rocks.

Miguel ran screaming into the clearing ringed with cabins. Screaming, "*Doug!*" Screaming, "*Help!*" And then the big man came racing into the clearing as well, and Miguel raced out of the clearing, taking the first trail he saw.

It was pure luck that led him down the trail that led to—

The Apache scout nest!

Miguel forced himself to run faster. He needed a lead. Then came the clearing, the hideout. He hit the ground, pulling the leafy hatch down over him.

And then he lay as still as he could, which wasn't very still, because his heart was banging against his chest like a hammer. It was banging so hard he could see in his mind's eye the little red organ wildly expanding and contracting inside him.

An instant later, he heard—and felt with his body—the big man's footsteps as he pounded through the woods. The footsteps crunched right over the hatch door. Kelly's cover of branches bent down so far that Miguel took most of the man's weight with his body. One foot—a foot that was hard as steel—caught the edge of Miguel's nose and cheek.

But still Miguel didn't cry out or make a sound. He lay still. He could feel the blood leaking freely out of his nose. Tears were running straight down the sides of his face and collecting in his ears.

He was so terrified. And that wasn't all. He was finally able to think again, and that meant he was able to think about how he was reacting. His father always said you could never predict how you'd do in battle. Well, now Miguel didn't have to predict. He knew. He had turned and run. Not just run. Peed in his pants. The big war hero. The big—

Miguel froze, suddenly reaching a new level of terror. The big man's footsteps were coming back toward the scout nest. He could hear the big man's heavy breathing.

The man came closer. Through cracks in the leaves and branches, Miguel could see the big man standing only yards away, turning his big masked face slowly back and forth. Miguel couldn't breathe.

Finally, the big man turned and continued on his way. Miguel was about to leap up out of the trap when—

He heard *more* footsteps. These were softer steps, nowhere near as big a man this time. "Big Red," called a voice.

It was a familiar voice, but Miguel couldn't place it. He didn't have time to think about it. Because now the big man was coming back toward his hideout.

Again the familiar voice. "He's right here, Big Red. No, here." A laugh. "Look *down*!"

The huge man looked down. Miguel was too scared to move.

Dumb Kids

Officer Donner hurried out of Denny's Diner, heading for his cruiser. He was a large man with a bristly mustache. He was moving so fast that some of the coffee he was carrying sloshed and burned his wrist. He cursed, and not because of the coffee.

It had been a horrible, horrible day. Three young kids and their grandfather murdered in Holloway. Reports of Tuck missing, along with Gabe and Ruth Gleason, and their retarded son, Big Red. It was beginning to look like someone had gone on a rampage.

Exhausted, and hoping for a moment's peace, Donner had stopped by the diner for his evening cup of coffee. So what does the cook tell him? The waitress, Darlene Skinner, didn't show up for work this afternoon. Not only that, two of the customers told Donner that some teenagers had come knocking on their doors this afternoon, saying they wanted info on the Jason legend, of all things. Saying they were staying out at *the camp*.

Donner jumped in the car. He set the coffee on the seat beside him, twisted the ignition key hard, revving the motor. Kids, he muttered as he sped toward the lake. Dumb kids.

Tina stayed in the water, clinging to the edge of the raft, for a long, long time. She didn't know how much longer she could hold out. She was starting to get this very weak and sleepy feeling. She felt so drained.

It was an hour before she spotted movement in the woods. She let go of the raft and let herself drop down into the water, trying not to make a splash. She had planned for this situation. She would put the raft in between her and the crazy man.

Taking a huge gulp of breath, she starting swimming gently—she didn't have the strength to swim hard—right under the raft. She

swam past the raft's anchor chain, where she had tied her dungarees and shirt. They floated in the green water like flags.

She was halfway under the raft when her lungs started to burst. She was three-quarters of the way under the raft when she realized she was going to drown. And it was a few long agonizing moments after that before she finally swam out from under the raft and came up out of the water, gasping for breath. She gripped the raft with—

Her hands... What was that on her hands?

For some reason Tina could only see out of her left eye. But still she could clearly see these long, slimy black things attached to her hands and forearms.

She opened her mouth to scream. But it was as if her mouth were stitched shut. She put a hand to her mouth, which meant she fell back into the water. Now she felt the big black leeches that were sucking from her lips, her cheek, her right eye.

She tried to pull herself up onto the raft. Horror gave her new energy. She spasmed upward. But still she didn't have the strength to get out of the water.

Frantic, she started swimming again, breast-stroking around to the side of the raft with the metal ladder. Her arms were so weak! She pulled herself up, rung after rung, and dragged herself onto the deck like a dying fish.

She was naked, but she didn't look it. The huge leeches had covered her body from the toes up, like a bumpy suit of rubber. She pulled at the leeches with both hands. But they held fast. They seemed to be attached to her with cement. Tina felt like her heart was breaking with fear. But she couldn't even scream.

With her good eye she watched the leeches. Their slimy, hideous bodies bulged as they sucked out the last of her blood.

Kelly came out of the woods. The huge orange sun was slowly setting, sinking right into Crystal Lake. She came down to the water's edge to watch. It was a beautiful sight, the way the round red disk

broke as it went behind the water's horizon line. The orange reflection melted into the water on all sides.

Well, she wasn't here to admire the scenery. Besides, it was starting to get dark again, and with the darkness came her old terror. Boone had warned her. Tonight was the night.

She took a step back, turning to go, and stepped on something loose. Her ankle turned painfully. Cursing, she walked around the bank in circles, trying to walk off the pain. Then she saw what had tripped her. The tape recorder, the one she had lent to Miguel and Tina. She picked it up and straightened quickly, her body suddenly tense and alert.

"Miguel?" she called. "Tina?"

The only sounds she heard in response were the usual lake sounds. The hum of insects skimming along the lake's surface. The splash of water as little creatures dove in and out, the *rivet-rivet* of the lake's big frogs. She looked out at the lake, but the water was calm and unbroken as far as she could see.

Then she looked down at the tape player in her hand. She pressed rewind, then stop, then play. Static, then:

"Listen, there's something I've got to tell you." Tina's voice. "Last night... Doug and I did more than watch that stupid trap, okay?!"

Kelly jammed her finger down on the stop button. She hit rewind. She played it again. This time she let the tape run. She was so stunned she could barely hear the words.

"You figure it out. Doug and I are going out now, get it? We're an item. You want me to draw you a picture?"

"...He's dumping Kelly as soon as we get home...."

Kelly felt her stomach heave. Betrayed! She stared down at the tape player, watching the tiny spools slowly turning, as if they were hypnotizing her. Then she lifted the tape behind her head, ready to pitch it out into the lake.

Just then, the tape played back Tina's bloodcurdling scream.

Kelly dropped the tape recorder and started to run.

Target Practice

Kelly was halfway back to camp when she heard the car horn—a long relentless blast. She paused, not knowing what it meant, then ran harder, drawing out her long hunting knife as she went.

When she finally emerged from the dark woods, everything in the clearing was flashing with red, like waves of bright blood pulsing out of some giant body.

Then she saw where the light was coming from—it was the spinning siren light on top of the police cruiser. The cruiser was parked sideways in the clearing, just past the Volvo. The doors were wide open. The police radio was broadcasting garbled voices into the dusky evening air. And right then, Kelly was seized with the awful certainty that she was too late. She had missed all the action, everything she had planned for all year long; it was over.

Then she saw the cop. He must have been crouched down behind the car. Now he stood up. His back was to her, but she recognized those broad shoulders and large frame. Yesterday. It was the man she'd seen coming out of Denny's Diner.

She ran toward him. She tried to yell as she ran, but her throat felt frozen and she couldn't get any words out. All she managed, just before she reached the cop, was, "Hey!"

The big policeman turned fast. Kelly skidded to a halt, so startled and scared that she dropped the knife.

The policeman was wearing Jason's mask. He was holding a gun in one hand. At his feet lay a pair of blue overalls. And next to the overalls lay a dead body, an ax planted in its belly.

Kelly backed up so fast she tripped and fell. She rolled over, scrambled to her feet, and started to run.

As scared as she was, she was thinking clearly. This was it! This was it! She ran straight for the center cabin—and the trap. Her plan was to leap over the trap and stand in the cabin, waiting for the man in the mask to follow her.

Then came the first gunshot. It sounded more like a firecracker than the gunfire she was used to hearing on TV. Just ahead of her she saw a chunk of wood fly out of one of the posts of the cabin porch. She kept running.

She reached the edge of the trap, planted one foot and was going into her leap when she realized that the trap's cover had fallen in.

She leaped anyway. She cleared the hole easily, falling down hard on the other side. It was only as she got to her feet that she saw what was *in* the hole.

Doug's body. The spikes had pierced his stomach, his neck. One skewered hand was raised straight in the air, as if he were reaching out to her for help. His other arm was twisted over his body at an odd angle—broken.

She turned to run up the cabin steps when the second shot sounded. She felt the hot whack as something smashed into her left shoulder and spun her around. She'd been hit.

She fell. She didn't stay down long. She climbed up the steps on all fours, and dove in through the open doorway just as the third gunshot rang out.

This time the searing pain ripped into her left foot. Groaning with pain, she forced herself to keep moving out of the doorway, out of the line of fire. The next bullet zinged through the door, ricocheted off a metal bunk bed, and bit deep into the back wall of the cabin.

Jesus, Kelly thought, that guy was an incredible shot.

Keeping low to the ground, she dragged herself to the window, which was draped with mildewing clothes. She peeked out the side. She could see the big man starting toward the cabin.

She didn't have a lot of time. She also didn't have a plan. She made one fast. The trap was useless. But there was still the gun, the one she'd left with Doug. Unless that was down in the hole with—

The horrible image she had just seen of her boyfriend jammed itself back into her brain. The outstretched hand, the other hand bent across his body. *No gun*. Unless he dropped it when he fell, in which case she was doomed. She'd have to go on the theory that she wasn't doomed.

She turned to crawl across the floor when, for the first time, she became aware of the radio, still playing its tinny tunes, but also playing static as the batteries slowly ran out.

Then she became aware of something else. The cabin was smeared with blood. If that blood was Kelly's own blood, then she had already bled to death, she thought wildly.

Then she saw the body parts. They were strewn everywhere. Her stomach turned over. But she got to her feet and started limping back through the cabin, trying to stay hunched over and low. The pain in her foot was astounding; it was singing an evil duet with the searing pain in her shoulder.

As she climbed out the back window, she could see the big man in the mask coming up the cabin's steps. He stopped when he saw her going out the window. He started to run.

She jumped, landing with an awful smack, cutting her face against a tangle of branches. A few feet ahead of her was the big pile of black dirt they carried back here from the trap. An insane thought occurred to her. If only they had put the dirt under the window to cushion her fall!

She got up and started limping away through the woods.

That was four bullets he had fired, she told herself. Probably his gun held six. She knew that's what was loaded into the gun in her cabin. She figured that if she could survive two more shots, and if she could circle around to the back of her cabin, she'd be home free. If! If! If!

She looked back, expecting to see the big man climbing out the window to follow her. He wasn't. And as she passed behind the center cabin, she could see him through the trees. He had gone back into the clearing; he was aiming the gun at her. She forced herself to put her full weight down on the wounded foot as she ran harder and —

Bang! The gun fired, but she was still running, so he must have missed her.

Which wasn't that big a breakthrough, because there was still one more bullet left and plenty of cabins to pass before—

Bang! This time he shot straight through the open front and back windows of Cabin Seven, and she felt the hot slug whistle past her head as she ran by.

But that was six bullets. Six! Six! She yelled the word over and over again to herself, rejoicing, as she reached her cabin and pulled herself up through the open window. She slung one leg, the good leg, into the cabin, all the time praying that the gun would be where she had left it this morning, on the windowsill.

It wasn't.

And as she stared heartbroken at the empty sill, bullet number seven slammed through the open window, splintering the wood of the back window frame, right next to Kelly's leg.

And now she knew where her gun was. The man had it.

She swung her leg back out the window as the eighth bullet fired. She still had one hand inside the cabin, holding the sill, and that was where the bullet struck. It felt like the bullet nailed her hand to the wood. She fell, hitting the ground hard. She almost passed out from the pain. But she got up. She started dragging herself off through the woods.

There was no way in hell she was going to last through twelve bullets, she thought bitterly. It was a miracle she had survived the first eight.

But she had a new plan now: The Apache scout nest. The thing was, could she hit that clearing with enough of a lead to get in the hideout before he saw her?

She tried to run but her leg kept buckling underneath her. She was cradling her wounded hand against her stomach as she limped onward. She couldn't see what this bullet had done to her; she could only see that her hand was slick and dark with her own blood.

She didn't have to look back to see if the man in the mask was following her. Bullet number nine told her that, whacking into the trunk of a birch tree only a few yards to her left. At least she had the woods, and the darkness, to protect her now.

She dodged around the trees, tried to run faster.

The clearing—she was going to make it! She dove for the scout nest. Except she didn't land on dirt. She landed right on top of what

was left of Miguel's body.

Killing Kelly

Ever since he was a little boy and saw his first policeman, Big Red had always wanted to dress up in a policeman's uniform. And he had always wanted to play with guns. Pa would never let him do either, not even on his birthday. Well, he had finally gotten his chance. It was even more fun than he thought it would be.

Red's glass eye kept showing him exactly where that mean girl was, zooming in on her as she ran through the woods. The eye helped him aim.

He stomped into the clearing. The tall girl was screaming in horror. She was trying to get up off that other teenager, the one Red had killed with the ax. She got to her knees. She was crying. Just like Ma.

He had her now. He walked toward her. She got to her feet and tried to run, but she was limping badly.

That limp. It reminded Big Red of something, *someone*, but he couldn't place who.

He kept walking toward her. She tripped over a root and fell. He was standing over her now. His Lucite leg was itching to give her a good swift kick. He tried to hold the leg steady. He wanted to do this one himself.

The girl was trying to get up. He placed a big meaty hand gently on the girl's shoulder and held her down. Then he placed the gun against the girl's left temple. She didn't move. Just stared up at him with soft gray-blue eyes. Eyes that were full of pain.

It was strange, but something about the way this girl was looking up at him made Red pause. Shoot! ordered the voice in his head.

But still Big Red waited. It was like he was trying to remember something, trying to remember back to before he had gotten so angry. That seemed far away. But back then, all he wanted was to have a friend, someone he could play with, someone like this pretty young girl.

Then he remembered something else. The girl had a limp. Just like Big Red used to have, before his artificial leg got so limber.

He lowered the gun, feeling puzzled.

The next thing he knew, the girl sprung forward. She grabbed the gun, her soft thin hands slipping around his big meaty one. Her hands were wet with blood. A finger pushed itself hard over his own finger, wrapping around the trigger. The finger squeezed. The gun fired.

The first bullet banged harmlessly off his fake leg. But then the girl turned his hand—and the gun—upward. And now he felt the muzzle of the gun pressing hard into his big soft belly. And she was firing again. They were firing together. And—*bang! bang!*—two bullets fired deep into Big Red.

The girl let go of the gun then, struggling to get to her feet. She backed away from him, staring at him.

He was really mad now. She was just like all the rest. If you trusted her, she shot you. Big Red was so mad he wanted to cry and scream and howl all at once. His glass eye aimed the gun for him, aimed it right at the girl's head. But there was only a click each time he pulled the trigger.

Big Red dropped the gun in disgust. Then he dropped to his knees. The front of his uniform felt wet and sticky. He looked down. There was a big circle of red on his stomach. Red, just like his name. The red was spreading.

Then Big Red felt the pain and he started to cry. The mean girl had hurt him bad. He wailed louder and louder. He rocked back and forth.

Through his tears, he could see that the girl was watching him. He could see her coming closer now. He held up his hands to be hugged. He needed a hug so badly.

Then he saw that the girl had picked up a stick. It was too late to do anything about it. He just bowed his head as she brought the stick down with all her might.

Monster-Hunting

After the girl had pummeled Big Red ten times across the head, neck, and shoulders, he started to get angry all over again. Maddier than he had ever felt in all his life, which was never, except for this last couple of days. Despite the pain in his stomach, he got to his feet. He reached for the stick as she jabbed it at him again.

He caught the stick, but only after the girl had plunged it right through the eyehole in his mask. He screamed. When he pulled the stick out of his head, there was a plop sound. His glass eye had come out along with the spear. The eye was stuck on the end of the stick, sopping with blood, but still alive, still gleaming with fury.

Big Red was feeling pretty furious himself. He flung the stick aside. His blue Lucite leg started kicking furiously as he stomped after the girl.

The girl backed away a few more steps, then turned and ran, limping hard.

The mask! Kelly thought desperately as she hobbled through the dark, dark woods. The mask! the mask! She had to get it off that huge guy's head.

She could think of only one way to do that. She limped back down the trail, heading toward the campsite. In her mind's eye she could see that large dead cop. The way that ax was planted in his belly, it was as if it were waiting for her.

But how was she going to get there, that was the question. With her foot the way it was, she could never outrun this guy. Never in a million—

She stopped short, then rushed forward, her body shrieking with pain. She had seen the answer, if only she could get there in time. She rushed toward the wide tree trunk, reached up and grabbed the first wooden rung, and started climbing.

The tree house. She had seen it last night when she was gathering wood for the trap. Whoever had built this tree house might have built her a second Apache scout nest.

She didn't have time to climb all the way up. She went up three rungs, then turned her body around so she had her back against the trunk. She held her arms at her sides, so that the trunk hid her body completely. She waited.

She could hear the loud thrashing sounds of the big man storming through the undergrowth. He clomped right past the tree. He didn't look back.

She waited until he was about thirty yards up the trail, then started down the ladder as quietly as she could. As much pain as she felt, she was also aware of a delicious thrill. She had turned the tables on the monster. Now she was tracking *him*.

She watched as he came out into the clearing, looked both ways. With its spinning siren light and yellow headlights, the police cruiser was a blaze of light. But Big Red turned and lumbered toward the center cabin where the radio still played, so softly now. The radio, like everyone in the woods of Crystal Lake, was dying.

The fool, thought Kelly with a dazed excitement. The great big fool. That cabin trap had worked after all. Cabin Five still seemed the most alive of all the cabins in the circle, and it had drawn the big oaf's attention.

She waited until he was almost to the cabin before coming out of the woods. Moving as fast as she could without making noise, she limped toward the police cruiser.

The big man in the mask had gone inside the cabin now. She had made it!

She closed her good hand around the handle of the ax in the cop's belly. But before she could even begin to pull—

Another hand reached out and closed around hers.

Boone

"Sorry," Boone said with that lopsided grin of his. "This ax is mine."

Kelly let go of the ax, gaping at her brother in horror. His hands, she now saw, were bony skeleton hands. He closed them around the ax and pulled. There was an awful sucking sound as the ax came out of the cop's stomach.

Kelly swayed; she had to lean against the car for support. Boone was waving a bony hand in the air. "Over here, you fool!"

Big Red came out of the cabin, staring dumbfounded out across the grassy field at Boone and Kelly.

"Yeah, over here," Boone repeated. "God, you're dumb. Do I have to show you everything?"

To Kelly, Boone said, "I knew you could take him, Kell, that's why I had to help him out a little."

Kelly stared transfixed at her brother's face. There were tiny white worms oozing in and out of his rotted cheek. He grinned. "You built a really terrific scout nest, kid. You really learned what I taught you. If I hadn't stuck Big Red's face right into that hole, he never would have found Miguel."

Kelly opened her mouth but didn't speak. It was as if all the anger and all the fight and all the hope were flowing right out of her. As if her life force was whooshing out of her like air out of a popped tire.

"Boone," she said softly. "Why are you doing this... to me?"

He stared at her thoughtfully a moment, brushing his rotted face with the back of a sleeve. "Why not?" He cackled. Then he waved to Big Red. "Come on! I haven't got all day."

At last Big Red started forward and—

Dropped straight down into the trap.

There was a scream from Red, a thigh-slapping guffaw from Boone. "Gee, Kelly, you got him with that trap business after all. All right!"

A big hand appeared at the edge of the trap. Big Red pulled himself up out of the hole. He had a stake going right through his good leg. He stopped to pull it out, screaming in agony.

"Hmm," Boone said to Kelly, "maybe the trap wasn't such a good idea after all. 'Cause he's still coming, and now he's going to be *really* mad." He laughed some more.

Kelly was crying. She could taste the tears that curled down into the corners of her thin mouth; they were mixed with her own blood. She felt something that amazed her almost more than everything she had seen that night. Fury.

"You... bastard!" she cried.

Boone looked surprised. "What's wrong?"

"You told me he wouldn't come until tonight!"

"Oh, yeah. Well, see, I meant he wouldn't come for *you* until tonight. He killed your friends during the day. I'm sorry. Did I forget to mention that?"

Kelly stared at Boone's grinning face in disbelief. "I came back here for *you*!" she screamed.

"I know," Boone said. "And it was really sweet of you." He chuckled. "Took you long enough to show up, though, I must say."

It was the final blow. Kelly lunged forward, trying to pummel him; even her wounded hand closed into a fist. But Boone reached out and pushed her back effortlessly. He seemed to give her only the lightest of shoves, but she went flying back into the cop car, her head banging back against the metal roof.

"Don't make me mad," Boone warned her, "or things will get really bad for you." Then he laughed. "That's funny, isn't it? I don't see how things could get much worse for you, do you?"

She glared at him. It was as if a huge door had been shoved open inside her, and everything that was hidden behind the door was rushing out. And what was hidden behind the door was anger and hate. Fury at her brother, who had let himself be killed. Boone had always taken such terrible risks with his own life. He was the older brother. He was supposed to be protecting *her*, looking after her. Instead he'd gone off and gotten himself—

"I hate you!!!!" She was amazed by her own words.

Boone's eyes were cold. "I hate you, too. That's why I'm going to help kill you."

"Kill me? You can't kill me!" she cried.

"Oh, no?" He smiled.

"You can't kill me, because you already *did*! You killed me last May, you *bastard*! You killed me when you came out here and let yourself be—"

She didn't finish. She was choking on her rage.

Boone kept smiling. "Gee, Kell. You really seem angry at me. That's kind of a big secret you've been carrying around, huh? I mean, no wonder you've been so depressed." He laughed, but then his rotted face twisted with guilt. "Listen," he said. "Don't blame me for this, okay? I *died*, Kell. You don't know what that's like. It's—" He stopped, waved a bony hand in disgust. "Aw, just wait. You'll see soon enough."

Sure enough, just then Big Red stumbled slowly around the cop car, the red siren light turning his white mask red, then white, then red again. He was soaked in blood. There were several dark holes torn in his uniform, the spots where the spikes had gone through.

"Here, Red," Boone said, handing him the ax. "Here you go, big fella. Chop her up nice, would ya?"

He handed the bloody ax to Big Red, who took it in both hands. For a moment, Big Red just stood there, looking at Boone stupidly. Then the masked head turned and pointed at Kelly.

Kelly turned and stared down at the ground. She found what she was looking for almost at once. The knife she had dropped. She bent down and reached for it as the ax came down.

Just for Kicks

She pulled her hand and the knife back fast. The ax blade bit deep into the ground, landing right where her hand had been.

She moved her hand again, reaching up to slash the knife's long blade across both of Big Red's hands, where they clasped the ax's wooden handle.

Big Red squealed. The ax dropped. Kelly grabbed it. Now she had both weapons.

Big Red made the rest easy. Weeping, he fell to his knees and lowered his head, as if he were resting it on an imaginary chopping block. Kelly slipped the knife into her pocket. Then, ignoring the pain in her hand and shoulder, she raised the ax over her head with both hands. She swung down. Big Red's head and mask came off as one.

Kelly didn't stop there. She kept chopping away wildly at the fallen figure with all the fury she felt for—

For *Boone*.

She straightened. Her older brother was right behind her. He was leaning against the police cruiser, arms crossed. Watching. His rotted face was only inches from hers. She smelled a foul odor, like dirt mixed with acid and excrement.

He shook his head. "I knew you were too tough for him, Kell." He sighed. "I was afraid of this. Now *I'm* going to have to finish the job."

Just then, she heard metal joints creaking. She spun around. At her feet, the huge man lay in pieces like a broken doll. One of those pieces was the artificial leg. The leather straps and buckles on the Lucite leg's thigh slapped together loosely, jangling as the leg snapped up straight. The leg bent at the knee. And then it kicked straight up at Kelly.

Who stepped to the side.

So that the fake leg caught Boone in the shin. He gave a low groan. The leg kept kicking, kicking and thrusting and stomping like crazy. Boone grabbed for the top of the leg, trying to pull the leg off of him,

but that meant he held the Lucite thigh in place as the hard blue leg kept kicking and kicking—

Kelly covered her eyes, but she could still see through her bloody fingers as the leg started to kick out Boone's insides. Until finally with a growl that became a scream, Boone managed to rip the plastic leg apart.

It was too late. His stomach was now a rotted, bloody mess. Sagging, he reached out for the open car door to hold him up. It swung shut under his weight, trapping and cracking three bony fingers. The hand stayed where it was as Boone slid the rest of the way down to the ground.

His head was turned toward Kelly, his eyes looking at her with fear. His mouth curled upward into a last smile. He reached a skeleton's hand out toward her in the darkness. There was a horrible hiss. Then his body began to writhe and burn right before her eyes. The worms were sliding out of him on all sides, wriggling into the safety of the blood-wet ground.

Soon there was nothing left of Boone but a thick gray mist, which curled upward from his body like a huge question mark.

And then—

For one brief moment—

The mist formed itself into a familiar figure. Kelly had studied those fuzzy photos in her scrapbook long enough to know him when she saw him. It was Jason. The boy in the white hockey mask. A machete in his hand.

The misty figure raised the machete, as if to swing at her, but a gust of wind blew the mist—and the image—away.

Funeral in the Woods

Kelly figured she'd be able to use the cop car's radio to call for help. But not yet. She had more work to do.

She used the ax to pry the white mask off the big man's face. The face behind the mask was sweet and stupid, a middle-aged man and yet still a baby. She didn't look at him for long. She took mask and ax to the nearest tree trunk, set the mask down on the wood, then aimed the ax at the mask with all her might.

The blow thrilled up and down her arms, like when you hit a baseball wrong, only a hundred times worse. But the blow did nothing to the mask; it was still in one piece, still glowing white and evil in the moonlight.

Kelly looked around the clearing. Her gaze fell on the huge hole of a trap by the center cabin. She stood thinking, another plan forming. It was an exhausting plan, but it seemed right. It seemed like what she had to do.

She began by examining the wound in her foot. She was missing two toes, and who knew how much blood. She took off her army jacket and her shirt, ripped the shirt into strips and tied a bandage. She made another bandage for her hand, the palm of which had a hole in it, and did the best she could to wrap cloth around the wound in her shoulder. Then she put the jacket back on. Even though the night was warm, she was starting to feel awfully cold.

She knelt down by the edge of the hole, looking down at Doug's body. A sob escaped her. Boone, Doug, Miguel. She didn't have to search for Tina's body. She knew she was dead as well. Jason had claimed a whole new batch of victims.

Kelly had no tears left. She sat at the edge of the trap, fumbling in her bloodstained jacket for her cigarettes. One Camel left. One last Joe Camel.

When she had smoked the cigarette down to a stub, she tossed it into the hole. She felt light as a feather. She had lost a lot of blood.

She climbed down and pulled the stakes out of Doug's body. It was a struggle, but she managed to drag Doug out. Then she dropped the mask into the pit.

She went around to the back of the cabin, pulled one of the shovels out of the pile of dirt they had hidden back there. She carried back a shovelful of dirt and stood above the pit.

At Boone's funeral, this had been part of the ceremony, dropping a handful of dirt on his coffin. Kelly hadn't been able to bring herself to do it back then. She did it now. She slowly turned the shovel on its side, let the dirt sift down into the hole.

"Good-bye, Boone," she said.

She grimaced once, then her face became smooth as stone. She stumbled around the cabin to get another load of dirt.

The police found Kelly's and Doug's dead bodies lying together right in front of the center cabin. The corpses were holding hands.

The police didn't find the trap. The leaves and twigs that Kelly had spread out on top were enough to distract them. After all, the cops had plenty of other stuff to look at.

Kelly had died only an hour before the police arrived.

At least she died with a comforting thought on her lips.

The mask was safely buried, she told herself.

No one would touch it down there.

She was sure....